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Preface

I have long wanted to tell my story, but have not known how. Many of my friends who were with me during the long days of the hunger strike, the sit-in and finally the massacre in Tiananmen Square would never be able to tell their stories. I am left alive; all my life in China, even the ordinary, uneventful days, has now taken on special meaning.

In telling this story, I have discovered how difficult it is. There is a massive amount of material about the Democratic Movement in the square, and at this short distance it can sometimes appear confusing, especially as much was lost during my escape from China. Most difficult of all has been making it understandable to a Western audience. Without the selfless help of many people I cannot imagine how this book would have been finished at all. Many names have been changed, but all the events are true. I hope one day to write another book using the real names.

I would particularly like to thank Violet Mah who translated a lot of the material into English, a special friend who wishes to remain anonymous and who came to the rescue of the book at a critical time, and David Frederickson who spent two sleepless weeks polishing the manuscript. I would also like to thank Mary Daly and Kris Dahl for their help; Robert and Helen Bernstein for their invaluable advice and to all at Macmillan for making a Herculean effort to publish the book on the first anniversary of the massacre.

Lastly I owe special thanks to Diamon Liu who translated part of the material, organised and shaped much of it, and without whose constant encouragement I could never have overcome the pain of writing this book. This book belongs to all the people who have participated in the Movement – any errors are my own.

Introduction

The events of May and June 1989 in Tiananmen Square were an unforgettable experience for anyone who watched them. Not simply the way it ended, with tanks crushing the tents in which some students had taken shelter, crowds jeering and shouting at the massed ranks of the army in Chang'an Avenue and carrying away the bodies of those who were shot down; but the great demonstrations themselves, with 100,000 people camping in the square and half a million or more marching in their support.

Even in a year which saw the end of Marxism-Leninism in half a dozen countries in Europe, it is the demand for democracy in China which stands out sharpest in the memory. Hearing the noise of the competing loudspeakers as the students broadcast Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and the 'Internationale' to drown out the propaganda of the Government telling people to go home to save their lives; seeing the extraordinary gentleness on people's faces; witnessing a risen people call for a better form of government and a more decent life. It was impossible to maintain a purely professional detachment as a journalist in Tiananmen Square. I wanted it to succeed more than I had wanted any political movement since the Prague Spring to do so.

In the hot May sunshine it took a long time to make my way through the square. Red banners floated overhead; white placards on bamboo poles blocked the pathways through the city of tents which the students had built. Over 100,000 people listened to speeches, met their friends, sat or lay on the ground, chatting, laughing, strumming guitars.

An intricate tune which someone played on a wooden flute as I passed by one day has stayed with me ever since. Over a few minutes I would be greeted by a couple of dozen students I knew. Sometimes they simply stopped to ask me to autograph their T-shirts – a craze which was doing the rounds. More often they wanted news and reassurance. They wanted to be told they were going to win. I could always think of reasons why they would.

Throughout their time in the square the students set a memorable example. People were polite and generous and helpful. You could leave anything of value on the ground and know that it would be there to pick up later. I never heard of a single instance of theft or violence throughout the entire period of the protest. The security police staged frequent provocations: on one occasion towards the end of the occupation they drove a truck laden with arms and explosives into the square and left it, presumably hoping the students would commandeer it and give the authorities the excuse to clamp down on them. But the students refused to be provoked. Throughout the twenty-two days, plain-clothes detectives took pictures of the leaders and anyone who spoke out against the Government; the students left them alone.

The leaders were not always united, and sometimes their arguments over tactics became angry. But in spite of their youth and inexperience, the decisions they took were usually the right ones, and they were most right when they were most bold. If they had not challenged the Government by demonstrating during the visit by President Gorbachev, their protest would never have received such worldwide sympathy. If they had not erected their statue to the Goddess of Democracy, which was regarded as the final insult by Deng Xiaoping and Li Peng, the democracy movement would have lacked the symbol that became a rallying point for everyone who supports the ideals of the student struggle.

It was in the centre of the square, on the steps of the Monument to the People's Heroes, that I first saw the small, bespectacled figure of Li Lu. Unlike most of the student leaders, who spent much of their time in meetings, Li Lu was gregarious and witty. The authorities regarded him, particularly, as a figure of hate. I saw him last a few hours before the army moved into Tiananmen Square. He was giving orders energetically and even in that tense, frightening atmosphere he seemed calm.

The protest changed China permanently. Despite the murder of perhaps three thousand people and the repression that followed, no one who saw the pictures of the demonstration on Chinese television, or heard about it on Chinese radio, or read about it in Chinese newspapers will ever forget it – which is as much as to say that the vast population of China will never forget it.

What they will remember most is that ordinary people like themselves – the People, of whom there was so much empty talk in Deng Xiaoping's China – could stand in Chinese Communism's most sacred place and demand the resignation of the Government, noisily, consistently and publicly. In the forty years since the revolution of 1949, no one had done that. In Imperial China the unspoken secret of empire was that the army had the power to topple any dynasty. Tiananmen Square showed that the People have the power to challenge the Government. Now that secret is out, it can never be ignored.

Those of us from the West who were privileged to be in Beijing at that time will remember it for another reason. The ordinary workers who turned out to support the students when the army moved in fought the tanks and guns with sticks, Molotov cocktails and their bare hands; that was extraordinarily brave. But the students in the square faced the army with the courage of non-violence.

On the night the army invaded the square, an armoured personnel carrier was stopped and attacked by a crowd of workers. It looked as though everyone inside would be pulled to pieces but a group of students drove a bus through the crowd to rescue the soldiers from the angry mob. Four hours later the last of the students in the square were being machine-gunned and clubbed. They neither surrendered nor replied with violence to the violence of their assailants. Theirs was a higher form of courage and they will emerge as the real victors of Tiananmen Square, when Deng Xiaoping, Li Peng and the others who gave the order to shoot them down have been swept away.

Li Lu played an important part in all these events, and his account of them is of considerable importance. But he has not simply written about the protest and its violent ending. He has given us a perceptive, sensitive account of what it was like to grow up in the stifling system created by Mao Zedong and how, eventually, he turned against it. Millions of young men and women went through the same experience. Mao built his society on the basis of total obedience; eleven years before the revolution of 1949 he set out his orders to the Communist Party:

(1) The individual is subordinate to the organisation;
(2) the minority is subordinate to the majority;
(3) the lower level is subordinate to the higher level; and
(4) the entire membership is subordinate to the Central Committee

The West watched the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath and assumed that the Chinese must be mindless automata to endure it. Li Lu's account shows clearly what really happened. Even children were obliged to merge their individuality into the bland worship that the system demanded. But beneath this remained the true individuality, no less real for being repressed. Tiananmen Square was the proof of that. It was a celebration of the true individuality of young men and women who rejected the old system as empty, cynical and corrupt. For their twenty-two days of real freedom they gave us a glimpse of a different China.

The 'normality' imposed by force in June 1989 is the most abnormal concept imaginable. The freedom that Deng Xiaoping and Li Peng claimed to be reasserting was simply a form of the old slavery. It cannot last. Student leaders such as Li Lu and others in the West will remain in exile only as long as a few men, mostly in their eighties, are in power. Li Lu's book presents us with an idea of a different China: the China we saw represented in Tiananmen Square. It wasn't killed by the tanks and bullets of 4 June, it was merely postponed. Its time will come.

John Simpson
March 1990

[redacted]

Prologue

I was standing in the Place d'Italie in Paris waiting for Chai Ling, the delicate girl who had come to symbolise for millions the student movement in China in the spring of 1989. She and her husband, Feng Congde, had called me in New York on 5 April just after their escape from China and their arrival in Paris. For ten months I had heard only rumours of their harrowing underground life in China. Now we were to meet again for the first time since we had said goodbye shortly after the massacre in Tiananmen Square.

As I waited, the square changed before my eyes. The cars became bikes. The faces became Chinese. And I heard echo the familiar voices and street sounds of Beijing.

And then I heard, 'We're here.' I turned and raced to embrace them. We stood by the fountain in the centre of the square and she said, in her intense, clear voice, 'We're free at last. Freedom is so precious.' She added, 'The road to freedom is too long.'

Where did all this start? I wondered. For months I had thought about what our experiences in Tiananmen Square meant – for my generation, for those of us on the square, for China. I finally sought an answer through recounting my own life. Of course, each of us who came to Tiananmen had their own intensely felt reasons for being there. Each of us who became hunger strikers had their own story. But in every one of us, there was a deep conviction that the individual must affirm their humanity against despotism in all its many forms and that each individual is of central importance.

That is what Tiananmen Square was ultimately about. And this is the story of how I came to be there.

CHAPTER ONE

Lizard

'One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight.' From left to right, from right to left, it was always eight. I lay on the bed and looked up at the wooden beams of the roof, counting.

The last three-year-old besides myself was crying in the big room of the kindergarten, a boarding-school for pre-schoolers, but soon even he would go. And I would be left all alone to count to eight from left to right, from right to left. The teacher would stop cursing as soon as the last parents came, full of apologies, the child's crying ceasing with their hugs. And then the door would close, the lock click, and it would be quiet.

I turned my eyes to the window to see the sun set, briefly beautiful, then dim. I knew the light would disappear. I knew the dark would come. I knew there would always be eight wooden beams.

Then the lizards came out. All over the floor and on the beams of the roof, I heard the sounds. I didn't hear them when all the children were there on weekdays but when everyone was gone, the noises began – ghosts walking, I thought – and the lizards, frightening with their horrible poison, began to scuttle about. I felt the darkness press upon me while the sound of the lizards grew louder. I held by breath, then, exhausted, fell asleep.

On Sunday morning, the darkness was gone, the lizards were gone, everything seemed normal again. And again I counted the wooden beams.

Then the hunger – I even dreamt of eating lizard meat. The smell of cooked lizard became almost tangible but the only thing I could do was drink water to fill my stomach so full it hurt and made me briefly forget my hunger. Even stomach ache was better than that.

Then I started to play. When everybody was there, there was little play. I was the very lowest in my kindergarten – the most outcast of all. I could never behave freely. I would be punished and cursed at by the first official of my class and all the other officials would follow his lead, heaping abuse on me. Only on Sunday could I play freely.

I jumped from one bed to another; I went round on all the fifty beds in the big room. And on the first official's bed, I jumped up and down as hard as I could, hoping it would collapse. But I was too little – I was only three. Nothing changed. His quilt was special, covered with silk. Sometimes I just sat on the quilt and stroked it. So smooth. It was much better than mine, which was only right as everybody was better than me. But on Sunday all the beds, all the quilts, belonged to me.

Later, the door would open. The others had come back, and would show off the goodies they had brought from home. They talked about the movies they had seen or the stories they had heard from their parents. Then we would see who had the most things; whoever brought the most and talked the most was, of course, the best.

My class had a first official, a second official and a third official. They were not chosen by the teacher. The qualifications were bringing the most things back from home, having a better and more comfortable life, being the best fighter. The first official was the 'king'. If you didn't obey him, he'd beat you up. That was the order of things in the kindergarten.

They called me Dry Shrimp Eye, because I was scrawny but had a big face with small eyes. I wore the same jacket and army-green trousers all year round. My clothes were covered with holes and patches. My nose ran and I was always dirty. Naturally I was at the bottom of the class.

At first I tried to compete with them. Once, when the teacher gave me two rice cakes, I didn't eat them. I was hungry all night and all Sunday because I wanted to compete with the cakes on Sunday night. But after the display, the first official simply took the cakes. He offered some to other children and ate the rest. He always bullied me and others who were small. He was fat but his face was fair, so we called him White Face; in Chinese opera characters with white faces are bad.

White Face somehow learned that my parents were people with 'problems'. So he taunted me, 'Your father's a spy and your mother's a landlord's daughter, and you're nothing but a bastard!' He started the children chanting, 'Bastard, bastard, nobody picks you up. Bastard, bastard, nobody picks you up.' On Sunday night he demanded any cake I had left. But now I ate the cakes before they came back. I ate one cake on Saturday and one on Sunday, but I was always unbearably hungry.

Kindergarten was like a prison. Every morning from Monday to Saturday we got up, dressed quickly and washed. Then the whistle blew and we lined up to go to the dining room across a narrow yard in another building.

There we sat at long tables with our hands behind our backs. The teacher made a speech. The big ones, who were six or seven, would recite some of Mao's quotations. If you didn't do it well, you got into trouble. In the middle class, we repeated the quotations after the teacher. The little ones didn't have to do anything.

After breakfast, we went to the playground to do whatever we liked. Sometimes the teacher would give a signal and we had to run to a square wooden fort. The game was to see who could climb the bars to the top of the fort – only you had to be sure to let the first official get to the top first. If anyone else got there first, he would regret it when the teacher was gone, which was most of the time; the teachers slept or did their errands. The one who got to the top first would be given a sweet.

Three afternoons a week we had to clean the school. This was considered a proletarian collective activity. After the cleaning, some would be praised, some criticised. Nobody really cared, though, if the place was clean. We did it mainly so that the teacher could find someone to criticise. The first official was put in charge. Teacher Yan came out now and then to check on us. Monkey, the second official and a sly weakling, flattered the first official, who would take his side. Monkey always bullied Blockhead and Blue Robe. But a few times Teacher Yan caught him idling and told him to pick up all the leaves in the schoolyard himself. We were glad, because we did not have to do any more work ourselves. But Monkey took his revenge on those who sneered. The teacher asked White Face who did well and who didn't. Monkey would tell White Face to report Blue Robe when the teacher asked who was responsible for not picking up a leaf. Sometimes Monkey deliberately threw a leaf on the ground and accused Blue Robe of negligence. Then Blue Robe would say it was not him. Teacher Yan hated people to cross her, so she hit Blue Robe.

White Face had some power, but Teacher Yan was the real authority so I knew it was important to be the authority. Teacher Yan controlled the children by making them hate each other, by encouraging factions. That was what you could do when you had authority.

The teachers beat the children with whatever was at hand – a fly-swat or a stick. Teacher Yan used a bamboo switch. At meals we had to sit still while the teacher put the food in our bowls. If you ate too fast, you would be hit. If you went on eating fast you would have to stand and watch the others eat. But you couldn't dawdle, either. And you had to eat everything.

Once Teacher Yan put a piece of fatty skin with a lot of hair on it in my bowl. I had always hated fat; it made me want to vomit. The way I dealt with fat was first to put it in my mouth; when I saw Yan turn away from me, I would swallow it whole. I always felt sick afterwards. Once I swallowed the fat too fast and it made me cough. I coughed out the fat and it splattered on the table.

Yan pulled my ear and made me stand up. She said to everyone, 'Look, he is still a boy, but already he has such serious bourgeois behaviour. The peasants work to raise us; Chairman Mao and the Party give us good food and clothes. But you don't value all this. You don't even want to eat meat! How you waste things! You were trying to play tricks, but you can never deceive me. I will find out sooner or later. You are sure to become a class enemy.' I was scared to death. The other children stopped eating and stared until the teacher waved her bamboo switch and told them to hurry up and eat. I was left standing. 'You don't want to eat meat,' she said to me. 'Now you'd better not eat anything.' She didn't let me finish my food, but she insisted I eat the piece of fat.

From then on I had a great fear of fat, of the meals, of the dining room, of the teacher and her switch. Later I found ways to revenge myself on Yan: when she was not there I broke her switch in two so she could only hit us with her hand. That wasn't so bad. But the fat was awful. Whenever there was fat in my bowl, I hid it in my pocket. My pocket was always very dirty.

One day a new teacher came. Teacher Li was sent down to our school in punishment for some mistake she made at the education bureau. Our school was the sort of place where people would be sent for punishment.

Li was very nice to us; she had studied education and child psychology. She wanted us to learn things so she started a course in

handicraft, where we made aeroplanes, rabbits and other things with paper. She didn't teach us long, but she left a deep impression on me.

She liked to sing. Before she came we seldom sang. There was an old accordion in the kindergarten which she used to teach us to sing, and we came up with all kinds of tunes. Poor Blockhead simply could not sing, yet he was very happy to join in with the others and sang the loudest. Teacher Yan would have hit Blockhead, but Teacher Li didn't even have a stick. She just looked over her glasses and smiled. She was very gentle with us. We laughed while we sang.

At night, after the light was turned off, we weren't supposed to talk. Teacher Yan came to check on us and we all pretended to be asleep. As soon as she left the room, a commotion would start – the most frightening one involved the lizards. They looked like fearsome little crocodiles and skittered rapidly across the floor. They were very poisonous; if they touched you, you would die – or at least your hand would fall off, we thought.

When the teacher was gone, someone would shout, 'Here comes the lizard!' Then everyone would scream and run around frantically to escape it. It was always White Face who led this, perhaps yelling, 'The lizard has crawled into Blockhead's quilt.' Others echoed the shout. Blockhead, frightened, would cry. When the teacher came and asked him who had shouted, he did not dare tell the truth. People who wanted to curry favour with White Face would say, 'It was Li Lu who shouted.' The teacher punished me by standing me by the door where it was cold. I said I didn't do it, but nobody would listen. If someone said it was you, then it was you. That was it.

This was unjust. It was not such an awful punishment to stay alone in the big room at weekends because that was my fate. But this was not my fault. I became angrier and angrier as I remembered all the things White Face had done to me – taking my cakes, cursing at me, ordering me about. He always made things my fault.

As hatred filled my heart, a lizard once crawled across my feet. I could not move; the teacher would beat me. The children all shouted, 'The lizard is crawling over Li Lu.' I wanted to run and hide under my quilt but I dared not – the teacher was coming. Transfixed, I watched the lizard crawl slowly over one foot, then the other. My feet seemed to swell with red and purple patches. I was cold and scared, but I was terrified about my feet. I could feel them swelling to an enormous size. They were totally numb, which was how the poison worked.

When the teacher left, the room was deathly silent. Perhaps I frightened them, standing there like a dead crane with staring eyes, saying nothing. After a while the teacher came back and told me to go back to bed. I was so numb she had to carry me.

All night I dreamt about what I would look like the next day. The monsters and demons I saw in picture books all came back to haunt me. The lizard grew into a dragon, its huge claws and long tail dwarfing me, its jaws chewing my feet away.

When I looked tremulously down at my feet in the morning, they did not look different. I examined them minutely. Nothing. They were the same.

But why hadn't the lizard poisoned me? Maybe the lizards were secretly on my side. After all, I was the only one who kept them company at weekends. And I never joined in when others threw stones at them and then ran away.

To test this idea that the lizard was my friend, I went to find lizards under the bricks. At first, I was a little afraid but gradually I found the lizard did nothing to me. Once I put my hand out and let it crawl over it. I looked at my hand apprehensively for a day, but nothing happened to it.

My courage grew. I was no longer afraid of lizards. As the outcast, I suddenly felt that now I had friends who supported me. My whole outlook began to change. Before, I always tried to find ways to avoid offending the first official. He had power, he was strong and could fight and had many supporters. When they joined together to bully me, I had felt bad and isolated. But now I had the lizards on my side. They were afraid of lizards.

When they played the game of shouting that a lizard had crawled into someone's quilt, I felt relieved not to be afraid. When they played the lizard game on the weaker children, such as Blockhead, I felt sorry for him. The next day I found he was all right. So the lizard had been listening to me when I willed it not to hurt Blockhead.

Gradually I grew in confidence; I was no longer scared of lizards, or of the first official and his gang. I started to think that I should do something to fight them. I knew I couldn't win if I fought them alone since they outnumbered me. They weren't as powerful as they looked, though, for they constantly fought among themselves, each struggling to get above the others. But very few would challenge the first official.

Once someone acquired that position, it was very hard to oust him so he became very confident and despotic. Gradually I realised that the most important thing was confidence: if you had confidence and believed you were right, you would feel stronger than others. I made up my mind that my friend the lizard would help me to punish the first official.

I started to collect lizards. One day I wrapped quite a few in my jacket and put them in White Face's quilt. I hid them under his pillow and waited for night to come.

After supper everyone stood in line to go to the bedroom. I walked slowly to White Face's bed. 'The lizards have crawled into White Face's quilt,' I shouted. Everyone was shocked. Up to now, only the first official or his lieutenants had started the lizard game. Nobody had even thought it possible that a lizard could ever crawl into the quilt of the first official.

Then White Face felt something crawling on him. He turned back the quilt and saw seven or eight lizards crawling in all directions. He screamed. Everyone tried to run out of the room. The first official started to cry. No one could believe that the first official could cry.

The teacher came in and told us to go to bed. Then she asked who shouted first. Nobody said anything. The first official was dazed: he had not completely realised what had happened. No one dared to say anything. Who shouted first did not seem important now. What shocked them was that this time it was true, whereas before it was just a game.

Lying in bed, I felt the lizards really were my friends. They had brought me revenge.

White Face fell ill, his face grew even whiter. Others dared not say a word. At night everyone looked carefully into their quilts. Since everyone was afraid, no one shouted. Only I could sleep well.

Several days later, they remembered that it was I who had shouted that day. I knew they would try to take revenge so I was prepared. When a group came up to me in the playground, I went to the wall, pretending not to see them. I played with the lizards, letting them crawl over my feet, hands and arms. When the other children saw this, they were amazed, nothing could be more fearsome than these lizards, but the monsters were good to me. The second and third officials looked at me in awe.

The first official, though, could not show fear: he swaggered over to me, clenching his fists, but I was prepared and hit him first, knocking him to the ground, which completely crushed his position as the number one leader. The second and third officials looked at each other, then left.

That night I went back to the dormitory as if nothing had happened, but the news had spread: everyone looked at me entirely differently. I became a sort of god, an incarnation of the lizard, and was given the name Lizard.

In our small society I rose from the very bottom right to the top yet I retained a deep sense of inferiority from my lack of contact with the outside world. When other children were talking about what they saw and heard on Saturday night and Sunday, I felt inferior. I had no way of acquiring information; I had no home, no one to take me out, no good food, no picture books, and nothing to offer round after the weekend.

After I became the first official, I wanted to change the system. White Face had the most food, and picture books, he saw most movies, his family was the richest. As first official, he had had all the privileges. He cursed, kicked and hit others whenever he liked. If he saw someone eating something better than he had, he would demand it.

In the north-east corner of the small playground in front of the school there was an elephant whose trunk was a slide and whose legs were immense stone pillars, twice as high as your head. Every Sunday evening, we gathered under the belly of the elephant. The children came here to present offerings such as sweets to the first official. Then we began to tell stories, what we had done or heard, what movies they had seen, what picture books they had brought back. We would hand round the picture books while someone was telling a story his parents had told him as best he could remember it.

Those who had seen the movie or read the book could follow each other's narrative. I had to ask detailed questions to understand a story and often interrupted the story-teller, who would try to make the story clearer. Most found it hard to answer my questions because they had not been paying close attention, but said that they would see the movie or read the book again more carefully. I could imagine the stories they were telling. I developed a keen sense of imitation, narration and imagination. I had a great thirst for knowledge.

These Sunday evenings thus evolved from boasting sessions into story-telling meetings and discussions. I would sum up what was useful to us, stories we could act out later on: after we talked about a war film, what interested us most was how to act it out ourselves – how the Liberation Army won the war, how they fought the American imperialists, how the story developed, what stronghold there was, what people there were, and so forth. I would divide the children up and assign roles. One side would be People's Liberation Army soldiers which I always led. The second or third official would lead the American imperialists.

Our schoolyard was surrounded by a high wall – too high to see or climb over. Not even tree tops were visible over it, except in the back corner where the wall crumbled and curved into the yard beyond which tossed the tresses of a weeping willow tree. We were not allowed to go there, but after I became friends with the lizards my courage grew. My inquisitiveness and imagination, which came from my shut-up life, focused on that intriguing, crumbling wall. Perhaps it would be my route to the outside world I had never seen.

After I became first official, I once told the third official to ask whoever came to take him home to unlock an outside bolt of the window. I went out through the window into the back yard. Although it was bigger than the dormitory, it was still small. The walls were so high that I could not see what the outside looked like. The crumbling segment, however, was lower.

It took me several weekends to move stones over to the wall. I piled them up until one day the pile was high enough for me to climb over. On the other side of the wall I was amazed to see ruins, a mound of rubble that retained some semblance to a terrace surrounded by walls on all sides. I dropped to the ground and started to explore.

I stayed in there all day, very excited. I ran about, sat on a branch of the willow, protected from the summer sun. I examined the ruins, climbed in the tree, dug in the dirt and did all kinds of things. When dusk arrived, I was up in the tree, and could see the sun fall into the far end of the field beyond the second wall, a huge balloon falling downward, slowly and solemnly. The feeling was wonderful. I was intoxicated with love for nature. The lizards were crawling around. I had friends everywhere.

Suddenly I noticed how dark it was getting. I realised I should go back, but I could not find a place to get back in. The walls were crumbling but very tall, impossible for me to climb over. I could not think of getting out by any other way than the way I had come in – but I could not get over the wall.

It was getting darker. Though it was summer, it was very cold at night. I started to feel scared. The sense of loneliness grew stronger. The vague shapes of the ruins became frightening, the insect noises sounded strange and threatening. Afraid and confused, I lay on a stone tablet and soon fell asleep.

I woke up blinded by the sun. It was Sunday. In the daytime I was less afraid; I felt as if I had conquered something.

I did not want to go back. I lay on the willow branch thinking and dreaming and throwing stones. Then I saw that one part of the wall was lower than the rest. I piled up stones, climbed over the wall and into the fields beyond. I walked back and forth in the fields. Eventually I came to the front gate of the kindergarten, which was open for the parents to bring back the children on Sunday afternoon. I sneaked stealthily through the gate. No one saw me or cared about me. Nobody knew what happened.

In the evening everyone came back. They talked about what they did at the weekend. Suddenly I felt that everything they said was so dull. What I had experienced was a great secret. My experiences in the ruins were different from everyone else's life. It was a bridge that led me to another world, another kind of life.

From that time on I went outside every Saturday and Sunday. I never told anyone about my adventures. The secret place belonged to me alone. Until I left the kindergarten, it was always a source of private happiness. It was a place where I could cherish my loneliness. There I could see it not as something that made me inferior, but as my treasure.

When I was about six, something happened. It was a Saturday when I saw what appeared to be the disc of a sunflower on the willow branch. It was black with lots of holes in it. I didn't know exactly what it was, but it looked fun to play with. I needed a stick to get it down. It was like digging at a bird's nest as it came loose. I hit it and it fell on the ground with a thud. Thousands of hornets flew out of it. I didn't know anything about hornets, and I was dumbfounded when they whined around me. Some stung my face. It hurt and I started to hit out at them with my stick. The more I hit at them, the more they stung. Thousands of hornets flew around me and would not leave.

Big lumps swelled all over me. The more violently the hornets attacked me, the stronger my will to fight them. Swiping at the hornets with the stick, I felt like a hero in the People's Liberation Army fighting American imperialists. But I couldn't hit even one of them. I was stung so seriously that I couldn't open my eyes or mouth. I was losing strength and finally I fainted.

CHAPTER TWO

The Castle

A week after I left hospital, my father came to collect me. 'We can't keep the child any longer,' said the head of the kindergarten. 'When we agreed to take him, we were doing you a favour. We would not normally accept a child of such terrible family background.'

I lost the only real home I had known for three years because of my family, and as my father carried me away on his bicycle, I wondered where I would be sent next. It took me many years to figure out what this 'terrible family background' was.

They can do anything to you if your background is bad. My mother was from a landowning family, and that's bad. My father listened to a foreign broadcast on the radio and someone overheard it, so they accused him of being a spy. That's even worse. Since the Cultural Revolution, all intellectuals have been considered useless. They, like my parents, who had been to universities, were put into the lowest, the 'stinking ninth' category.

Shortly after I was born, my parents had to send me to foster families who weren't too frightened to take me in, and then I went to the kindergarten. Even now my parents couldn't keep me. They were both under political attack, and couldn't even have a home of their own. They hardly ever saw each other and were in no position to raise me. My father took me to live with Da Pa (Big Dad).

My father and Da Pa had met in the coal mines that were all around Tangshan. They were an odd pair, the intellectual and the worker, brought together when my father, the accused spy, was 'entrusted to the care of the people'. He was assigned to Da Pa's mining team and they became friends. My father admired Da Pa's strength and sense of fairness. Da Pa saw my father as a man of learning and integrity who never complained about working in the mines.

Da Pa was a handsome medium-sized man with heavy eyebrows and closely cropped hair. Though he looked strong, his health was very poor and his lungs were bad. He was taciturn and slow, as befits a man of strong character.

As a child he could not go to school, so he had great respect for educated people. After the liberation, he took part in a course to eliminate illiteracy, and ever since had tried to learn to read. He covered the walls with newspapers and, in the evening after work, he would take out his glasses, put his long pipe in his mouth, and see how many words he knew on the wall. He respected my father for his learning; because of this, he was criticised by the leadership of the mine. He hated the 'struggle meetings'.

Da Pa and Da Ma (Big Mum) had six sons. Lao Da (Elder One) was fifteen or sixteen; Lao Er (Elder Two) was thirteen. Xiao San (Little Three) had died in infancy, but his memory was preserved. Xiao Xi (Little Four) was a couple of years older than me, and the twins Xiao Wu (Little Five) and Xiao Liu (Little Six) a year younger. Da Pa was very strict with his children; they looked on him with awe. He often told them, 'Cause no trouble but learn more words.' That was how he taught his children. He rarely beat them and they were obedient, honest and did well in their studies.

Da Pa's house was as nondescript as the next, its gabled tarpaper roof and grey cinder-block walls no match for the rough sand brick or top-quality steel brick of the city's better buildings. Da Pa was proud of the strong reinforced concrete beam that ran the length of the building at the peak of the roof; it would never sag or break as a wooden beam would. There wasn't much space for eight people, just two rooms and a small courtyard where Da Ma raised chickens. The front door led into a square kitchen, dominated by the huge stove that burned wood and coal and always held a big black pot or two.

Through a curtain was the room where we ate, slept and lived. Running the length of the room and more than half its width was a long *kang*, the brick bed platform heated from below that is the focus of every traditional north Chinese home. A wooden screen divided the *kang* sleeping space for Da Pa and Da Ma from the rest of us. Opposite the *kang* sat two chests with the family's collection of cups

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and teapots and a large mirror. A few wooden stools were scattered about.

Da Ma was a typical good-looking north Chinese woman with big eyes and thick eyebrows. Though not tall, she looked large, since she was a little heavy. She was efficient and energetic. At night she did piecework, pasting paper boxes for a factory. The chickens she raised laid many eggs – a rare luxury in those days for chickens were very expensive – which brought much-needed income to the family. Most of our clothes were made by her and, when she had time, she even wove the rough warm cloth and carefully dyed it. Clothes would be handed down from Da Pa to the eldest brother, then to the second brother, the fourth, the fifth and the sixth. They ended up as rags which Da Ma would then use to make soles for shoes. And with the rags that were too frail even for soles she made dolls for the youngest boys.

Each morning after she made breakfast, she woke the children by tapping one little head after another with a ladle. We would all rush to wash, except for Little Five, who was a bit slow. After sending her husband off to work, she got the first three children ready for school. Little Five, Little Six and I stayed at home and went out in the streets picking up tree branches for firewood and collecting thrown-away cabbage leaves for the chickens.

When Da Pa came home, she prepared some 'good food' for him, though even that was not very good. He had worked for years in the mine and his wages were considered high, but with so many mouths to feed, each got only a little share. He was always very tired. He had a bad cough – but still smoked – and everyone took care of him when he came home. He did no housework, but would sit on the *kang*. Sometimes Da Ma offered him an egg which he ate uncooked, making a small hole in it with a nail and sucking out the inside.

This was the best time of day for the whole family. We all crowded on to the same part of the *kang*. Elder One and Elder Two did their homework; the other children helped Da Ma paste paper boxes. We would chat about everything under the sun. Sometimes Da Pa would study the newspapers on the wall with us. Often neighbours called in. Da Ma was kind-hearted and she helped anyone with problems – she didn't care for gossip but people liked to talk to her about their worries or grievances. I would lie on my stomach on the *kang*, with my feet up in the air, and listen.

Four or five families lived in our little street. Da Pa's family was in the middle. To the west of us lived Big Fool and his parents, a typical miner's family. His father was an alcoholic who always carried a little bottle of cheap sweet-potato gin. His red eyes bulged; his eyelids were swollen and droopy. He was only in his forties but he looked older and was already completely bald. The family had almost nothing. Every day when the father came home, his wife would set out the liquor and two plates with peanuts and pickles on them. Usually poor people drank only when there was something to celebrate – a birth in the family or a national holiday – but this man drank cup after cup. He could drink half a litre of gin.

Big Fool grew up to be very strong and robust. He was stout and big, taller than anyone else in his age group. He wore a quilted jacket tied at the waist with a rope and hardly felt the cold. His head was shaved in the old-fashioned way, with a small clump on the forehead, and heavy eyebrows like his father's. Big Fool had been backward since birth and stammered. He still wet the bed in his teens. His mother would put the quilt out to dry and everyone saw that Big Fool had wet the bed again. They laughed at him.

He loved to stand on the garbage heap and look into the women's side of the latrine. One day he was seen by Aunt Zhang who sneaked up behind him and poured a bucket of urine over him. For a long time after people would ask him, 'How did you feel with all that urine on you? Didn't it smell?' He would say, 'No – no – it – it – it didn't . . . smell.' People found this hilarious. They would say to his face, 'No . . . it – it – it didn't smell.' He had big eyes that could look alarmed but generally he had a foolish smile on his face. He had lost one of his front teeth and wind whistled through the gap whenever he spoke.

Big Fool's father had come to Tangshan from a small village and was very strong. He worked in the mine as an apprentice to Big Fool's mother's father. He often helped with the household chores and, since the parents had only three daughters, they accepted their young apprentice as an adopted son and later agreed that he marry one of the daughters. He was very hard-working and quite good-looking, but he had a violent temper and already drank too much. Originally it was planned that he marry the eldest daughter, but she found someone else and eloped.

The father was furious at this: an elopement brought great shame to a family. In order to salvage some of his family's dignity, he decided to marry his second daughter to the apprentice. Big Fool's

mother was unwilling at first; she already had a boyfriend. But the parents insisted, and the two got married. They got on well for the first few years. Big Fool's mother did not think about her boyfriend much, though she didn't forget him either. She just tried to serve her husband. But after her parents died, Big Fool's father became the master of the family.

Now that there was no one above him he lorded it over her. He beat her often, but she was so ashamed she told hardly anyone. Gradually the beatings became worse and worse. She was covered in cuts and bruises. The family became poorer and poorer because he spent most of his money on drink. When he collected his wages, the first thing he did was to buy liquor and pig's ear, which was considered a good dish by miners. (Real meat was unthinkably expensive.) He put a little table on the *kang*, sat on it and started to drink. His wife served him and stood meekly aside. He fed Big Fool liquor with a chopstick when he was a little boy and gradually Big Fool became a drinker too.

Father and son would drink the night away. On nights like this, Big Fool's father would spare his wife but the next day, when little money remained, he would become enraged and accuse his wife of stealing it and beat her. This routine took quite a toll on her: though only in her mid-thirties, she looked as if she were in her fifties. And yet, if you looked at her features carefully, you could see she had been a great beauty when she was young. Her eyes were almond-shaped with thin eyebrows, and her nose was narrow and straight.

Big Fool's mother and Da Ma were good friends, and she often told Da Ma of her suffering as they sewed under a dim light in winter. 'Look what a good family you have,' she would say. 'Your children listen to you and look up to you. Your husband doesn't drink and never beats you.'

One day, when I came back from school, she was talking about her former boyfriend who was well off. She said, 'Only because I listened to my father, and took a wrong step.' She was a typical Chinese woman, who stoically bore everything that came her way. She cried and sighed with Da Ma, her only relief in this hard life. She said her husband was not a bad person – sometimes he was good to his son and her. If only she could earn some money and buy him plenty of liquor and good food, then he would be good-tempered.

In summer, Big Fool's father liked to play cards. The men turned over a big shallow iron bowl and used it for card games. At the end

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of the night, the one who lost would have to balance the bowl on his head and walk from one lamp-post to the next, up and down the block, without dropping it. Usually at midnight you would hear shouts and clapping, and you knew someone was undergoing this ordeal. It wasn't easy and often the loser ended up crawling on all fours so as not to let the bowl fall off. The men did not like to play with Big Fool's father because he would not carry the bowl when he lost but he loved playing cards, especially when he had no money to buy liquor. When he lost he became unreasonable and when he won, conceited and arrogant.

Once we had a fight with some other children from our street. During this fight Big Fool shouted, 'Your father is a spy.'

After the fight, Da Pa punished all his sons except me. I cried and asked him, 'Aren't you my pa? Why did they say my pa is a spy? Are you a spy?'

Da Pa said, 'I am your pa. Just ignore what Big Fool said. You know he's a fool. He talks stupid nonsense.'

'There is this other man, I also call him pa,' I said. 'Who is he? Is he a spy?'

Da Pa sighed and said, 'Don't think about it, child. You stay here. Nobody can do anything to you. If anyone wants to bully you, you have me here.'

Big Fool's mother came over and apologised, saying, 'Don't listen to Big Fool. It's not true that your father is a spy.' She caressed my head and said, 'He's such a nice, intelligent boy – but *pitiful*.' I felt pained at heart.

When I think of the Zhangs, I think of true evil. Aunt Zhang was the director of the neighbourhood committee in our district. She was tall, thin and ugly, with a pockmarked face. Uncle Zhang, in sharp contrast to his wife, was short and fat. Both had small eyes, especially Uncle Zhang; when he smiled, they disappeared. He was of a younger generation of miners and didn't marry until he was well into his thirties. He was quite relieved to have a wife, even an ugly one from the countryside. Unlike Uncle Zhang, however, his wife was not unpopular when they were first married. She liked to visit friends and chat. She knew how to talk to people, and made an effort to get to know their affairs.

Uncle Zhang got going with the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. He knew he was looked down on but suppressed his anger.

He became active in the struggle meetings, especially when it came to criticising the Old Foreman. The old man was the previous foreman in the mine; everyone still called him that even though he had no job now. Uncle Zhang criticised the Old Foreman until he was in tears. Workers were angry with Zhang, but the leadership liked it. When the Old Foreman was still in charge, he knew his workers well. He knew who worked hard and who didn't. He didn't like Zhang, and never raised his wages. Zhang always hated him and when he saw his chance, he took revenge on the old man. He said the Old Foreman exploited and oppressed the workers, drank the workers' blood and served the Japanese invaders. Old Foreman was thus labelled a historical counter-revolutionary, a traitor, and a spy. Uncle Zhang, on the other hand, was praised by the leadership. During the latter part of the Cultural Revolution, when propaganda teams were sent to monitor other work units, Zhang was assigned to be a member of the workers' propaganda team in a middle school. That was how Zhang got out of working in the pit, which most other miners could only dream about.

Uncle Zhang soon became infamous. People despised him even more as he seemed to do nothing but eat fat pork – he gained the nickname Fat Pork Zhang. For the half year that he managed the dining hall at the middle school, the teachers said they never saw any pork and they understood where it was all going. The school leaders didn't like him, and Zhang was not interested in the work of the school, nor was he able to read or write. He called teachers 'stinking intellectuals'. He was happy just to be out of the mines. He became fatter and fatter and looked like a ball.

Not only did Uncle Zhang eat his fill at the school, he also took food home and he and Aunt Zhang entertained various leaders with the stolen food. In the end she got the post of director of the neighbourhood committee. It wasn't a highly paid job, but gave her a lot of power. Ration tickets were required to buy such things as meat, fish, beancurd and vegetables that were in short supply. If she didn't like you she could simply tell you that she lost them, or that she did not get enough tickets from the district government.

She also controlled residence registration. If the police found out that you didn't have the proper stamp on your papers, you became a 'black person' and could be thrown in gaol. Her close connection with the police gave her further power. When the police wanted information they would go to the neighbourhood committee and ask

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who were vagabonds, who criminals, who was not behaving properly, who had uttered counter-revolutionary remarks, etc. No evidence was required. If the director wanted to harm someone, she could fabricate a story and the victim would be interrogated and prosecuted.

After she became director, Aunt Zhang was a changed person. The only thing unchanged about her was that she still went visiting. She was like a spy poking her nose into other people's business and then reporting to the leadership in order to win favour and promotion. She was cold and cruel and always found ways to hurt people.

One day when Big Fool's father was playing cards, the men happened to cover the big bowl with a newspaper that had a large portrait of Mao on the front page. Nobody noticed it and they began to play cards on top of the portrait. Fat Zhang and his wife came by. As soon as she was near she screamed, 'What! You're playing on a picture of Chairman Mao!'

Big Fool's father, already cross because he was losing, exploded: 'What are you screaming about? What picture of Chairman Mao?' He hadn't noticed it, as from where he was sitting it was upside down.

Aunt Zhang insisted, 'Of course there's a picture of Chairman Mao on the paper. Of course there is.'

Big Fool's father said, 'We're not playing any more.' He stood up and tore the newspaper and as it tore he saw the picture.

People were afraid of the Zhangs but not Big Fool's father. He reckoned he was from a good family background and didn't have to be afraid of anyone. He would curse anyone who came his way and, besides, he had always hated the Zhangs. But now Aunt Zhang had her chance. The next day two policemen in white uniforms visited Big Fool's house. Everyone came out to watch.

After the police left, sounds of things being thrown around and broken came from Big Fool's house. Neighbours ventured in. Da Pa, Da Ma and I went in, too. Big Fool's father was still cursing Aunt Zhang. 'You vixen, you bitch, you witch! Why shouldn't I have the freedom to play cards? You reported me. For three generations in my family we are poor peasants. Why should we be afraid of you?' As he raged on, his wife told us what the police had said. He was ordered to write a self-criticism and told not to go to work until they thought it was good enough. If he didn't write a good self-criticism, he would probably end up in prison. He had committed two crimes: the first, his vicious attack on the picture of the great leader Chairman

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Mao; the second, his rude behaviour towards a revolutionary cadre, namely Aunt Zhang.

Da Pa told the crowd to go away and brought Big Fool's parents over to our house to discuss how to handle this. Big Fool's father got himself a bottle of liquor, cursing all the while. 'Is this the new society?' he asked. 'Have I lost even the right to play cards? This is worse than the old society.'

His wife said, 'Do you really mean that you don't want to live any more? You tore up a picture of Chairman Mao, and now you curse the new society. So you really must be ready to die. You are destroying the whole family.'

He retorted, 'What are you telling me? Have I lost the right to curse, too?'

His wife snatched the bottle from him, saying, 'The trouble has all come from your drinking. Look what you've become.'

He slapped his wife hard across the face and said, 'I don't have the right to play cards. I don't have the right to curse. Now you are trying to deprive me of my right to drink.'

Da Pa went over and said to him, 'Look at yourself. Look how much trouble you've brought to your family. If you were put in prison, not only would your life be damaged, but also the life of your wife and son.'

These words shook him. He heaved a long sigh and cried to Da Pa, 'What a time we are living in. What can we do? You all scold me for drinking. But what can I do if I stop drinking? At work no one talks to me; they think I'm scum. I won't flatter the leadership like Fat Zhang does. I earn my money. But now I'm worn out. I've got the same disease as you, brother. I don't think I'll be able to work much longer. What will I do then? I have a good wife and I owe so much to her. But my son is not clever. Big Fool knows nothing; he doesn't even know how to talk properly. How can I depend on him?'

Finally, he calmed down. Da Pa made a pot of tea for him and then the two men smoked and started to talk about how to get over the difficulty. At last, they came up with an idea. Da Ma would go with Big Fool's father to Aunt Zhang with gifts. Aunt Zhang respected Da Ma. When Aunt Zhang first came to this area, she was looked down on; she was ugly and nobody liked Fat Zhang. But Da Ma was good to her. So Big Fool's father went to the Zhangs with Da Ma, and the Zhangs spoke to the police. That was that.

Even though the Zhangs were powerful now, they didn't stop being cruel to the Old Foreman. By then he was well over sixty. Da Pa said he had been to school when he was young, and at the mine was foreman in charge of developing new tools and safety measures. After liberation in 1949 he lost his position, but people were good to him and he was kind. When the Cultural Revolution came, though, he was repeatedly criticised. Fat Zhang took the lead in accusing him, and the list of his crimes increased daily. In the end he was expelled from the mine, his house was confiscated and his only son driven out. His wife had already died. He was all alone and the endless struggle meetings had almost driven him insane.

Now he bowed and smiled to everyone he saw. Even children would command him to stand at attention and shout, 'Long live Chairman Mao!' He would stand very straight and shout, 'Long live Chairman Mao!'

He had no job, so he had become a ragpicker. He had lost his house so he built a tiny mud shed, so small that his *kang* took up half the space in it. The other half was filled with all the trash he had picked, which he would sell to the dealer once every two weeks.

Aunt Zhang often said to him, 'Eh, Old Foreman, you've encouraged young people to do bad things recently, haven't you?'

He would stand there saying, 'Yes, yes. I haven't behaved properly.'

Aunt Zhang didn't know what to do with him. She said, 'Remember, you must behave properly.'

He would say, 'Yes, yes, I'll behave properly.'

I liked him. I would go to his shed. In the evening he did nothing but catch lice. He had only a ragged quilted jacket, which he wore all year round and never washed. His eyesight was weak and he had a hard time finding the lice, but he did the job very seriously and carefully. He was very excited when he found one, and made a great fuss about killing it. It was as if all he could do was bully the lice because he was bullied by everybody.

When he saw Da Ma, he stopped behaving as he did with others and became melancholy. Da Ma and he would talk about his son. As his family had been quite well off in the past, his son was not used to roughing it. He was married to a country girl, whose family looked down on him because he knew nothing about farm work. The old man needed his son to take care of him and had long wanted him to

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come to the city but he could not get over the hurdle of the Zhangs – Aunt Zhang refused to issue a residence card.

Once the Old Foreman fell seriously ill. Only Da Ma went to look after him and sometimes I went along. She heated the *kang* for him. He cried over his ill luck. 'I don't know how I have offended the Zhangs so that they would not let my son stay with me.'

Da Ma sympathised with the old man, and went to talk to Aunt Zhang about letting his son come to the city. She took me along with her. Aunt Zhang said to Da Ma, 'Actually I have a lot of sympathy for him, although the Old Foreman treated my husband badly in the old days. But the refusal of his son's request comes from the leadership above me. The Old Foreman is a counter-revolutionary. How can we sympathise with a class enemy? You must not have anything to do with him. Big sister, we are good friends. You must be careful. Keep away from him.'

She pretended to be very concerned about Da Ma, but really she was giving her a warning. When Da Ma came back, she said to Da Pa, 'People change when they become officials.' I didn't quite understand her point at that time. But Da Pa understood. He told his sons never to get involved in politics.

I couldn't like the Zhangs, no matter how I tried. I really felt for the Old Foreman. He always got up before daybreak, at four or five in the morning. Early risers sometimes saw and heard him sing. But if he saw anyone, he would stop. He had an *erhu*, a Chinese violin, with broken strings. It still hung on the wall. He would handle it lovingly now and then. The snatches of Beijing opera he sang were all from *The Romance of Three Kingdoms*.

I often went to see him and listen to his stories. Once when some children tried to bully him, I fought them off. It was then that he told me the story of Jing Ke, a hero who lived long ago in the state of Yan. When the King of Qin, now renowned for his 'terracotta army', prepared to invade the much smaller Yan, which could not defend itself against its more powerful neighbour, Jing Ke volunteered to go into the enemy's castle and assassinate the King of Qin. His people gave him a hero's send-off and he set off on his desperate mission. Posing as a turncoat, he came to the tyrant with a valuable map of Yan; as he unrolled the scroll for the greedy King of Qin, he pulled from it his dagger and leapt at the King; but the King's guards cut down Jing Ke. The King of Qin conquered Yan, along with all its neighbours, and he started the Qin dynasty (221–206 BC); but Jing

Ke has lived in memory as the hero who braved death to defend his country's liberty.

I sometimes went with the Old Foreman on his rounds. Once, when my head was still full of Jing Ke, he took me into an abandoned four-storey building where he went to pick through the rubbish. I was amazed and excited at the great dim space. 'You could play here whenever you want,' he said. 'No one comes here.' And that was how I found the castle, which became a stronghold for me and my friends.

We liked to read picture books about fighting and acted out the stories in our games, staging mock wars. We divided ourselves into two groups, the good guys and the bad.

We made guns which could fire three or four shots like machine-guns. During the day we stayed in the stronghold, discussed what to attack and made paper bullets. At night we disguised ourselves and prepared for action, then attacked other groups who might be playing games in the street.

In the castle we built bunkers with bricks and tiles and shot from the gun holes. The paper bullets hurt if they met their mark but couldn't do much harm. Soon a lot of people gave up gang fighting and joined in this game. This life in the castle lasted a year or two. Then an unexpected incident abruptly ended these games. One day we went to the castle and found the grass covered with paper smeared with blood. We were astonished and couldn't imagine what had happened. We were afraid, too, so we walked away from it. The next day we saw more of the same paper smeared with blood. This happened several times. All the members of our guerrilla detachment went to see it, but nobody knew what it meant.

The concept of sex was a mysterious one – and was always linked with mystery, crime and evil. People talked about sex only in the most vulgar jokes. So when Little Frog suggested that this paper was to do with sex, everyone called him a hoodlum. He said he had evidence that parents used this kind of paper when they wanted to have a baby and made love. Finally, one day when we were going to the castle we found that the entrance had been bricked up. In front of the blocked entrance hung a poster with two names marked by a big red cross. It was an announcement by the court, and many people were there discussing it. We hurried over.

It was said that a man and a woman had been spending nights there together. They couldn't get a wedding certificate because their

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work unit would not give them approval. They couldn't wait any longer and chose our castle – a deserted building. The court accused the man of rape and the woman of being his accessory; the man was sentenced to two or three years in prison and the woman to physical labour under the people's supervision outside the prison for two or three years.

As we stood there, a crowd surged towards us. In front of the crowd was the young couple. The woman had a pair of worn-out shoes around her neck to show her defilement and the man, while beating a gong, shouted, 'I am a rapist! I am a rapist!' They tried to hide their faces but in vain. Their expressions were very sad. The woman with the worn-out shoes looked so distressed.

For a long while none of us children said anything. We did not know what to think. We felt grieved partly because of the event and partly because of the incomprehensible mystery surrounding it and were sad that we had lost our castle.

One day I heard that there had been an explosion in the mine. Dozens of miners were trapped. I was on my way home from school with Little Five; the streets were almost empty. An old ragpicker told us there had been an accident in the mine. We ran to it, and there we found Da Ma. She looked stunned. Her husband was among the dozens of miners down there.

We waited a long time in silence. Then a whistle blew and we saw about ten miners emerge pushing carts. On the carts were bodies covered with white cloths. People dashed to the carts. Wives burst into tears when they found their husbands lying there. Those who did not find their husbands asked repeatedly where they were. When some discovered that their husbands were still alive, they fainted with joy.

Da Ma and I looked hard, too. Suddenly we found Da Pa on a cart. His face was blue, his mouth, nose and ears full of coal cinders. He was cold and hard. Da Ma covered her face with her jacket and never uttered a sound. She collapsed.

Throughout the night, neighbours came to see us. Everyone cried. They knew that suddenly this family had lost its pillar. What would they do now, a family of six children and a mother? People cried their hearts out. After midnight they tried to persuade us to go to sleep. Da Ma tried not to make a sound. The next morning her eyes looked like two big peaches. She told us children to stay at home and not go to school.

She went alone to lay out Da Pa. She washed him and wrapped his body in the white cloth bought with money provided by the neighbours. Then the body was taken to be cremated. But Da Ma didn't want this. She was from the country and was superstitious about cremation. Even when the order came that the body must be cremated, Da Ma still refused to let it go. An official came. At first he tried to comfort us by saying that Da Pa was a very good person who had died while performing his duty for the country and the revolution. Da Ma cried and cried and asked him to give her back her husband. In the end Da Pa was cremated because the leader insisted. The day of the funeral procession Da Ma cursed herself for not being able to prevent the cremation.

After Da Pa's death, the family collapsed. We had nothing left. The mine gave us a few hundred *yuan* and did not even explain what caused the accident. Da Ma and some other widows tried to appeal to the court for several years, but nothing happened. Very soon the family had nothing to eat. At first our neighbours gave us some food but who could afford to support another family for long? Elder One was fifteen. He took his father's place and became a miner.

The day before he went down the pit, Da Ma was very sad. She said, 'Your father died; I am helpless now. If I had any other way out, I would not let you go down into the pit. This is not work for human beings. The leaders are not human.' The other children all stopped going to school. Every day they went out to pick cabbage, gather firewood, select partly burnt briquettes, and sell ice lollies. I could no longer stay with them.

CHAPTER THREE

Moving the Mountain

When I was seven or eight, my parents were being rehabilitated. My father was transferred to the Coal Research Institute and my mother to the Orchard Commune. We even had a small room. Though it was no bigger than a room in the student dormitory, my family finally had a space of its own. Every few weeks my mother would come in from the commune and we would get together. I called the days when we were together 'the days I have a home'. But I felt awkward with my parents; they were like strangers to me.

I had never called them Papa and Mama, and I found it hard to do so now. They seemed so serious and often just looked at each other in silence. Or they would talk about things that I could not understand. My sixth sense told me to be silent, to observe them and stop being the undisciplined boy of the streets. I could see that my parents hated my wildness. Sometimes when they heard about my exploits, they would scold or punish me. It surprised me that they could have so much to say and I admired their ability to talk for such a long time without stopping.

Sometimes when my father left town on business, he took me with him. That was interesting. Once, in summer, he took me to Beijing; I remember I wore a black jacket and a pair of blue pants with two big patches on them. In Beijing I felt I had come to a truly strange place. There were so many people. I didn't know where I was, I just followed my father. We left the noisy railway station and got on a huge bus – much bigger than the buses in Tangshan. Everything was new to me. As we rode, I looked out and there was Tiananmen Square. It seemed to stretch out endlessly. When we walked in the square it seemed boundless. I had my picture taken there. I remember my father told me not to move. A man stood in front of me, and I heard a click. I was very nervous.

After Da Pa died, I moved back to my parents' home. I was almost nine. There was still a gap between us, but Da Pa's death had helped me mature. I started to adapt to my new environment. My father often went away on business, leaving me with friends or relatives. So far, I had lived in at least nine families. I often saw Da Ma. Emotionally hers was still my real family, but she was too poor to provide for me. I felt superfluous, being shunted from house to house, and, gradually, inferior. Perhaps the world did not welcome me. I wanted to grow up fast so I could make money and support Da Ma.

One day, my father's institute told him that he would be sent away from Tangshan for six months. My mother was still living in the Orchard Commune and none of my parents' friends could take me in for so long.

One day at school, Teacher Wang said to me, 'I hear you're leaving us. Do you still want to learn to read and write?' She was the only teacher in whose class I did not make trouble. She was very patient, never scolded anyone. Every child, she believed, must learn to read and so taught us. I told her I wanted to study. She said, 'If that's the case, you should not leave here. You can live in my home if your family cannot take care of you.' I was surprised. Wang had never met my parents; she had taught me for only about a year and, besides, I was not a good student. Why should she want to help me? I was puzzled, but I stayed with her for several months.

Wang had three children. The oldest was a girl who was about to graduate from middle school and go to the countryside. The second was a boy of about my age, and the third a mischievous little girl. Her husband worked as a clerk in the Bureau of Electricity. He was a quiet, honest person. He did much of the housework, which was highly unusual in Chinese families.

Their room was divided into three compartments: one for the parents, another for Big Sister, and the third for us three little ones. Sometimes the boards were taken away and we had more space. There was a low table on the *kang* where we children crawled around, reading and writing. I had to learn ten characters every day. Uncle Wang read the newspaper in the evening while Teacher marked our schoolwork. Sometimes he asked if we knew a word in the paper; sometimes he would tell us a story or read some old poems.

Then something happened which abruptly changed this life. It started with a fight. After Da Pa died, I hated fighting, and Teacher Wang often told me not to fight and especially not to fight 'Fatty', who was two or three years older than me and much bigger. Fatty's father was the chief of the Bureau of Electricity, a very influential post. Nobody dared to offend him. Fatty lived on the east side of the road, where children had better food and clothing. He led the east side children, and often bullied us. Because I was told not to fight I avoided playing on the road; under the influence of Teacher Wang, I had begun to love reading and liked to stay at home and read on the *kang*.

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One day I came home early from school. Since no one was there, I was bored. But outside, some neighbourhood children were throwing stones at a target, so I went out to join them.

A pretty little girl with pigtails stood nearby. Her family, I knew, was very poor and humble – her father sold ice lollies, her mother sewed clothes for others, and the little girl had dropped out of school to help her father sell the lollies. She made no attempt to join in our game, but merely stood watching us.

When the game was in full swing, Fatty came up behind the girl and pulled her pigtails. She struggled to get loose, and her head hit Fatty's face. He was furious, dragging the girl along by her hair. When she screamed in pain, I went up to Fatty, slapped his face and said, 'Let go of her!' Startled, he did so and the girl ran away crying.

Fatty was momentarily stunned; nobody had ever dared to touch him. Outraged at my boldness, he pushed me over. I was not as strong as he was, and had not intended to start a fight. But he would not let me go, and three of his followers helped hold me down while he hit me in the mouth. I bit his hand. As he recoiled, I threw him off, seized a stone, and began hitting him on the head. Fatty's followers were scared stiff. They had never really had to fight; bullies that they were, they usually just hit their victims and left. They had hardly expected a skinny boy like me to fight so fiercely and effectively, and they ran away, abandoning their leader. Fatty begged me to release him. I left him there.

Later, at home, even though my mouth hurt terribly where Fatty had hit it, I behaved as if nothing had happened. Then at dusk I heard a lot of people coming, with Fatty crying among them. Quickly, I hid in the woodshed; I knew what was in store for me if they saw me.

Through a crack in the wall, I could see the scene in the street. At the head of the crowd was Fatty's mother, a shrew of a woman. She had her son on one side and dragged the little girl along on the other. The little girl's parents were there, too, and the head of the local safety committee. Fatty's mother shouted abuse at Teacher Wang and her husband, who worked under Fatty's father in the town government. She shouted, 'What kind of boy have you people taken in? You've taken in a wild dog, a savage bastard! He has bullied this little girl without reason. And when my son tried to stop him, Li Lu hit him with a stone.' She shoved Fatty forward, looking pathetic with a big white bandage on his head.

Fatty's mother cursed every member of Teacher Wang's family, and slapped Uncle Wang's face. My teacher and Uncle Wang could only swallow their anger. They didn't know the true story and it was clear that Fatty had been hurt. The shrew warned them that when she found me, she would have me locked up in prison and throw away the key; I was clearly so incorrigible that I was probably a political reactionary as well, and they'd never let me out.

Listening in the woodshed, I was terrified. It was getting dark now, and I slipped on to the roof of the house, afraid they might search for me inside. Just as Uncle Wang was about to say that I had been there only a few minutes before, my teacher said, 'We haven't seen him all afternoon. Who knows where he has gone? I'll see if I can find him.' The crowd looked around for me for a time, but gradually left.

Now Uncle Wang vented his anger on my teacher. 'You're the one who took in such a boy. Look what disaster he has brought to our family. You said he was a good boy, that he had a sense of justice. But look what's happened – he not only bullied the little girl but injured the boy who was trying to protect her. How can we keep a child like this? Why do you still protect him? Where is he? He can't have gone far.'

My teacher kept quiet. After a while she said, 'I know this child. He is not the kind of boy who would bully others.' On the roof, I was listening with tears in my eyes. 'I know him. I also know the other boy and his parents, and you do, too. Ever since the child came to our home, he has behaved well. Don't you know what happened to his parents? What he needs now is warmth, not abuse. We must find him, even if it means missing supper. We must never let those people catch him and put him in prison. That would be the end of him.'

[redacted]

I was ready to come down from the roof and save them the trouble of searching when I heard Uncle Wang's voice. 'If we do find him, we'll have to send him away somewhere else. He's bad luck; we'll all be done for if he stays one more day. Don't you realise? Our daughter has just graduated from middle school, and I've almost talked the boss into letting her stay in the city to work in a factory. But with all this happening, he won't do a thing for her, just to spite us for what happened to his son, and she'll have to go to the countryside.' My teacher said nothing. I knew she must be deeply pained. And I knew it was true that if they wanted to keep their daughter in the city, they had to appease Fatty's father. I felt like a jinx: wherever I went, bad luck followed. In despair, I cried.

The Wangs returned from their fruitless search, my teacher hoarse from calling for me and Uncle Wang no longer criticising me. They kept saying, 'He's such a good boy. We can't let that gang get their hands on him.'

I could hold out no longer and cried, 'I'm here. I'm up here.' Joyfully, they helped me down from the roof; I was so stiff with cold I could hardly move. Wiping her tears, Teacher Wang told her husband to brew some ginger tea for me. I cried and cried, unembarrassed; I felt so warm and protected in the house with them.

After drinking the ginger tea, I gradually calmed down and told the whole story of what had happened.

Uncle Wang was furious when he heard the truth. But we still didn't know what to do.

Next morning my teacher got up early. Uncle Wang had gone to work. She said to me, 'Let's go and apologise to Fatty and his family.' If she had said it the night before, perhaps I would have done so but now, in the morning, I said it was not my fault and I would not apologise. She looked very sad and said, 'All right. If you don't want to go we won't go. But let me tell you a story. Do you remember the story Chairman Mao told us in his essay? Once upon a time there was an old man. This old man had a wife and a good, obedient son. Every day they went out to cultivate a small piece of land and lived a good life. But one thing troubled them. There was a big mountain in front of their house, right outside their door. Every day they would pass the mountain on their way to the field.

'The old man thought, I have suffered from this, but I don't care that much now. Yet my children will have to climb the mountain every day. I should move the mountain. So he decided to move the

My teacher said, 'If you are determined to move the mountain, you'll have to move it piece by piece. You can't do it all at once.'

I understood and said, 'Let's go and apologise to Fatty, Teacher.' Now my teacher was embarrassed. She felt deeply sorry for me; she knew I had been wronged. Her elder daughter would soon graduate from junior middle school and my teacher was trying to get her a job in the city. She depended on Fatty's family to help with this. If she failed, her daughter would be sent to the countryside. If I didn't apologise, she would lose any chance of keeping her daughter in the city.

Teacher Wang then went out and spent half her monthly salary on fruit, powdered milk and other special foods – delicacies she would never think of buying for her own family. We took the presents with us and went to see Fatty.

When his mother saw me, her eyes immediately became two fireballs. She jumped at me and jabbed at my forehead with her finger. 'So you are Li Lu! You are Li Lu!' She grabbed me and hit me again. How I hated her! My face was burning with rage. At any other time I would have bitten the fat hand that was grabbing my collar. But I remembered my teacher's story and suppressed my anger.

My teacher handed over the presents and asked how Fatty was. He was lying in bed swathed in bandages. He started crying, but without tears. When Teacher Wang reached out to comfort him, Fatty's mother immediately pushed her hand away and said, 'Don't you touch him. He's already seriously injured. You'll just hurt him more.'

Teacher Wang's face turned red to the neck. She could only offer more apologies, to which Fatty's mother retorted, 'Your husband is such a good man. But look what you've done. How could you have taken in a criminal like this boy? Do you know what his family background is? His father could be a spy, or a landlord, or a capitalist.' My heart skipped a beat, but I quickly realised that she could not really know anything about my father. It was just angry talk.

She kept saying, 'How could you have kept this bastard in your home? He was so cruel to my son. What if his father is really a class enemy? How could you have been so stupid? I don't know if you should be teaching children. We put the next generation into your hands and you behave like this. How can we safeguard our political power if the next generation turns out to be criminals like him?' I clenched my teeth with hatred for her.

[redacted]

My teacher's face went from blue to purple as she apologised. 'We're sorry. His parents are good people, revolutionary cadres. They are very busy, so I am helping to raise him. It's all my fault. He is a good boy. I was careless this time so that he made a mistake. Please take your anger out on me.'

At this moment Fatty started wailing again. I felt unhappy that Teacher Wang was being abused because of me. I stepped forward and said, 'No, it was not my teacher's fault. It was all my doing. It was all my fault. I am sorry, Aunty. I'm sorry, Brother Fatty. I apologise to you. I'll kneel down before you.' I knelt down. With tears in her eyes, my teacher immediately pulled me up and said, 'It was all my fault. I didn't educate him in the right way.'

Fatty's mother was dumbfounded. She didn't expect me to do this. Fatty's screaming turned into laughter. Jumping on his bed, he called to me, 'Eh, boy, come over here.' I went over to him. 'Will you be my horse when we play War of Knights?' he asked.

'Yes,' I said, 'I will.'

He always wanted to be the knight and never the horse. And as he was cruel he always picked a thin little boy to be his horse. None of the horses could stand his weight, so he always lost in the battle. Then he would get angry and blame the horse, and beat it. Now he wanted me and I had said I would be his horse so his mother could no longer accuse me of being a class enemy or the son of a class enemy.

'All right,' she said. 'I forgive you this time. I have already told Old Liu, the police inspector, to investigate this case and look into the boy's history. I told Old Liu if it turned out that the boy belonged to the enemy class, he should be sent to a reformatory. Now you've come and apologised today and shown a correct attitude. My son also said that he could forgive you. All right, you can go now.'

My feelings were complicated. I suppressed my anger and comforted myself by thinking that I was moving the mountain bit by bit. I said in my heart, 'Wait till I grow up, Fatty. See how I will settle accounts with you.'

As we came out of the house, my teacher sighed. She wiped tears from her eyes. We did not say a word. I knew how heavy her heart was. We walked in the sunlight, aching in silence. I felt such loneliness, indescribable bitterness, helplessness, but also hope, understanding and love.

After the death of my Da Pa and the fight with Fatty, it seemed

that my childhood was over. I was no longer carefree; I lost all interest in war games. I wanted to see and learn so many things. I started to observe, study and understand people. I became more and more reserved and introverted. I was beginning to understand that mountains could only be moved little by little.

[redacted]

CHAPTER FOUR

Earthquake

At 3.30 on the morning of 28 July 1976, on a narrow street in a small city in the northern part of the People's Republic of China, the Old Foreman, unable to sleep, was pacing the street, his fan in his hand. He used to walk the streets at dead of night, when all was quiet. As he walked, he savoured his memories of his old life, and prepared himself to endure the coming day.

While he was walking, he saw a huge red burning ball rising from the edge of the horizon. A white light followed immediately. As soon as the white light faded, he felt the earth shaking. All of a sudden he was lifted up into the sky, then thrown back on to the ground. As if in the power of a demon, he was flung from one end of the street to the other, back and forth many times. He could see the sky was falling down and the ground sinking. When the sky fell on him, he lost consciousness.

Two days later when people rescued the Old Foreman from under the fallen walls, he was on the point of death. But he couldn't stop repeating his story. He said that he had seen a general from heaven with a red face, cloaked in a red robe and armed with a silver sword, who descended to earth like a burning fire. When he saw that there were so many miseries on earth, he slashed at the earth in anger with his silver sword, causing the earth to shake and move. Thus, the sky fell and the ground caved in and destroyed the ugly earth. And he himself went to heaven. The Old Foreman told his story over and over again. According to him, he was in heaven already. Perhaps he was the lucky one.

The night of the great Tangshan earthquake, I was sleeping at my parents' flat, where they lived with my brother and aunt. I woke abruptly, gasping for breath. Thick dust filled the air. I couldn't work out what was going on. I wanted to get out of bed, but couldn't stand up, the ceiling was too low. As I moved, I bumped into the wall. And I was on the floor, and the bed was above me, making a tiny room. I had to get out and finally crawled out of the tiny room into the big one. Everything was dark. Then I heard my parents calling my name. I tried to reach them. The ground was covered with broken glass and bricks, but I finally made it.

My father kicked a hole in the wooden door. They decided to let me go first because I was the smallest. They helped me through the hole. As soon as my feet touched the floor outside, I started to roll down; small bricks rolled with me, hitting me and drawing blood. The already twisted and tilting buildings were still shaking, and more bricks came down on me like rain. One hit my head, almost knocking me out.

My father immediately followed me. He found an iron railing and told the others to slide down it. It was a better way out.

Finally, although the entrance was blocked, I found a place where there was a hole through the rubble. I fumbled and crawled until I breathed fresh air. I was outside.

When we all got out, we were dumbstruck. It was utterly dark. Nothing was visible; there were no lights, no moon, no stars. The solid ground under my feet had gone. There were broken bricks everywhere. There was no road ahead. I had no sense of orientation. We were overwhelmed by a sense of horror. Nobody dared to talk but my father was calm. We just held hands. As soon as one of us moved in one direction, the rest followed until we stopped. Then someone would move in another direction and we would follow blindly.

My father said, 'Wait a minute, everyone.' His words brought us but of our daze. 'Go, to the small playground.' A white light flashed n my mind and I saw the small basketball field with its cement benches around the edge. We held hands and followed as my father ed the way.

The ground under us became smooth. We were on cement, and we didn't have to stumble over broken bricks. Everyone sighed with elief. I saw some ghostly shadows around us and realised that a lot of people were about. But nobody talked. Even when they bumped nto each other, they didn't say a word. Everyone was dumb. More

and more ghost shadows gathered on the basketball field – over a hundred. The silence was terrifying.

Suddenly, someone screamed. When the noise died down, a loud voice spoke: 'Revolutionary comrades, the time has come to withstand the test of loyalty to our Party. Just now the Soviet and American imperialists have dropped an atom bomb on us. They have wiped out the whole of China. We are the only surviving great revolutionaries. We must fight to the very end.' Then he started to scream and whimper again. His vocabulary had all come from movies. But people believed him, believed that the atom bomb had been dropped.

He screamed and shouted slogans: 'Never forget class struggle! Chairman Mao teaches us to be prepared for war and disaster on behalf of the people!' Then he groaned and passed out.

After hearing the slogans, people started repeating them, as well as calling out the names of their loved ones. And my aunt started the Buddhist chant 'Ah Me Tuo Fuo,' which at the time I thought meant your wishes would come true. Since the Cultural Revolution, when religion was swept away, nobody dared to pray, because they were sure to be criticised and reported to the Party committee but now my aunt and other old women were praying.

Someone said, 'Comrades, I went to check things out. Our buildings have all collapsed except the fifth one on the west block and the third one on the east block. All our relatives and the brothers and sisters of the proletarian class have been buried under them. They are struggling on the edge of death. There has been a huge earthquake. Comrades, let's hurry to save lives.' His tone was calm but his words were emotional; suddenly we calmed down. 'Comrades, please believe me. My name is Li Rui He. I work in the coal selecting department. I am faithful to the Party, Chairman Mao and the people. Most of our proletarian sisters and brothers are still trapped under the buildings. Doubtless many have died. Others are still fighting for their lives, looking for a way out. Let's hurry and help them. Let's go and get them. While I was looking around, I saw people crying for help everywhere. They are waiting for us.'

It was my father. After listening to him, everyone started talking. How about the west building? Did the second building on the east block collapse? My father answered that they had all collapsed; we must hurry to save lives.

'All right,' said one voice. 'We'll follow you. Let's go and save them.'

'But hasn't the atom bomb been dropped and the Soviets come to attack us?' someone asked. 'Are we going to see the Soviet soldiers?'

'Of course we will,' someone else said. 'In MiG planes. Maybe the soldiers from the sky have already landed!'

My father pleaded, 'Comrades, please believe me. This is an earthquake. Let's go and save lives.'

Someone else said, 'It doesn't matter what happened. Since the buildings have collapsed we should go and save lives.' There were over a hundred people in the basketball field. The crowd started to move out in groups to search for surviving relatives and friends.

Suddenly I remembered Da Ma again. How was she? And her children? I wanted to save them. I started to run from the basketball field. I heard my mother calling my name, but I kept running.

There were chunks of concrete and brick everywhere. I tripped on one and fell badly. I felt immense pain and one leg became numb but as soon as the pain receded, I started to run again. I ran by instinct, for I could no longer tell the direction. It was pitch dark, and there were no longer any roads. Everywhere the ground was bumpy. I was confused: I forgot where Da Ma had lived, but it wasn't very far away. I had to save Little Five, Little Six and Da Ma. I ran for my life.

Once I ran up a hill but came to a standstill when it turned out to be a pile of rubble. I had one mission and that was to save people. But as I was backing off, I heard a voice. I went a few steps further, and heard another voice crying, 'Save me!' I listened more attentively. The same cries came from everywhere and nowhere. 'Save me!' 'I'm suffocating.' I looked around but couldn't see anyone. The cries were coming from under the rubble, where people were shouting for their lives. I didn't know what to do. No one was near me so few survived. No one had come there to dig. I started to walk away, but the cries were everywhere. Suddenly I tripped over something. My hand touched something fleshy. It was a severed arm. I blacked out.

I woke up as heavy rain poured down. No thunder, no lightning, just heavy, dirty rain. The roaring splash smothered the cries. The rain filled up the whole world. It became darker and darker. I couldn't see or hear anything. I was scared. The heavy rain frightened me even more. Aimlessly I started to run, slipping and stumbling on the

rubble. I spotted a red light ahead, and ran as fast as I could towards it.

After a while I reached a place where the ground was even. There was a small wood nearby. I entered a cluster of Chinese parasol trees, whose large leaves were big enough to serve as hats. The rain thundered on them. Under the biggest tree was a red light; when I went close I saw that the light came from a burning candle, and I heard a miserable scream.

Several women had made a human tent with raincoats and their bodies. In the centre a woman lay on a coat, naked. I had never seen a naked woman before. Most of the women around her were old and middle-aged who were either naked or with only panties or shirts on. I saw the black hair between the legs of the naked woman on the ground. I was shocked. I had never known what a woman looked like. I heard cries coming from the woman, but I didn't know what was happening. Just then an old woman outside the human tent saw me and yelled. 'You, little thing! Get away!'

Scared, I ran to the other side. But the cries didn't stop. They were sad but they contained a special attraction, a primitive power. I sat down under a tree and didn't move; my wide-open eyes stared in that direction. Then I heard bits of conversation. One old lady was saying, 'Don't worry, Dafeng. It's coming out soon.' She said it over and over again. The woman cried, 'I can't take it. I am in such pain!' Later, I heard a baby crying.

I looked round in the daylight. All the buildings were gone. I ran as fast as I could towards the place where Da Ma and her family had lived. I had to cross a street, but there were no longer any streets. When I finally found the area nothing was left; the little huts occupied by the miners were gone. No one was in sight. As I walked along, hoping to find something familiar, I saw an old man sitting naked but for his underwear. He had a branch in his hand and was silent. But for the wind brushing his grey hair he looked like a sculpture. A dog was walking around him. I went over and asked him where Da Ma was.

'Oh, she's down there. They're down there.' He pointed the branch to the ground. 'Under the ground. Everything is flat, flat.' He said it over and over again, and the dog kept running around.

I walked on hastily until I saw the big Chinese scholar tree that stood near Da Ma's house. There was a big well beside it.

I walked over to the well. I saw Big Fool and his father busy pulling someone out of the ruins – a woman with matted hair, her body covered with blood and dirt. When she was pulled out, she could breathe more freely. With her eyes closed she breathed hard. Then suddenly she shouted, 'Long live Chairman Mao! Long live Chairman Mao!'

It was Aunt Zhang. She blinked as her eyes adapted to the light, looked around and saw Big Fool, who had pulled her out by the leg. 'Big Fool, good child. Chairman Mao has sent you to get me out of the bitter sea. When I was down there, I thought that Chairman Mao would not forget us. Now he has sent you. You are a good child.' I grabbed Big Fool and asked about Da Ma's family. There was sweat on his head and bruises on his hands. His body was covered with blood. His legs were shaking. He pointed and stammered, 'Over there – there.' I ran over. Nothing looked familiar. The house had caved in, but the roof survived. Someone had dug a hole in the roof to look inside. When I looked down through the hole I saw six pairs of blue and black legs lying there, lined up on the *kang*. All their upper bodies were crushed under the roof beam. The last time I had seen legs of such colour was when Da Pa died. He had been proud that the beam of the house was made of cement instead of wood.

I called out to Elder One. No answer. Blood and white fluid were oozing out between their legs. I screamed their names over and over again. And then I heard a weak voice calling, 'Brother Deer.' I knew that it was Little Six. Only he and Little Five called me by that name, because when we had played together, I had been swift like a deer. But I could only see one of Little Six's legs. His upper body seemed to be under that of Da Ma and both of them were under the beam. He said, 'Brother Deer, help me. I can't breathe.'

I ran to Big Fool and his father. 'Please save Little Six. He is still alive. Please hurry and save him.'

Big Fool said, 'I can't push it, I can't . . .' I didn't understand.

His father explained. 'We have tried most of the night but we couldn't move the beam. We'll save others first and when we have more people, we'll try again.' My tears poured down. I stumbled back to the hole in the roof.

I remembered that when Little Six and I used to wrestle, he wouldn't complain when I tumbled him on the ground. Instead, he would call me a hero. When I first arrived at Da Pa and Da Ma's home, I was very lonely. Someone pulled my sleeve. I turned and

saw Little Six. He was very thin with big eyes. He said to me, 'Did you stay in a kindergarten? What was it like?' I told him that we lived there with fifty of us in a big room and that I hardly ever went home.

'Don't you really have a home? Where are your parents? Da Ma told us to treat you like a brother. Are you really my brother?'

'I don't know.'

'Don't you know where your parents are?'

I was a little upset and said, 'What's the big deal? The kid in my picture book doesn't have parents either. But he's still a hero.' He asked me to tell him the story. I remembered a story about an anti-Japanese hero. So I told him the story, half of which I made up.

When I finished, he looked at me with admiration. 'How do you know so much? I think you're a hero. You're great.' Later, 'you're great' became his catchphrase. He followed me wherever I went like my shadow. We fought together in the streets. Losing or winning, we stood up for each other.

The more I thought about these things, the more I tried to move away the things on top of him. As I worked, I said to Little Six, 'I've come to save you. Please wait for a while.'

At first he was still saying things like 'Hurry, Brother Deer. I can't breathe.' Then for a while I just heard his breath, and then not even that. Suddenly the world was upside down. I didn't know what to do so lay down on the ground, recalling his voice: 'You're great. You're a hero.'

When evening fell there were only a dozen or so survivors in the neighbourhood. We used broken wood and bits of this and that to make a tent. The living all crowded into the tent, with the seriously injured in the centre. The dead were placed outside.

Elder One was the most critical but he was alive. When more men had helped to lift the beam, they discovered that Little Six and the others were dead, but Elder One had survived, with much of his lower body crushed. He kept talking in his dreams. When he awoke, he called for his mother and brothers and talked until he lost consciousness.

When I woke up the next morning, everyone had gone, busy burying the dead. Only Elder One was there, unconscious, with foam at the corner of his mouth. He needed water, and I went to find some. When I reached the little playground, at first I saw only bodies but soon I found my mother sitting under a plastic tarpaulin. I realised

I hadn't eaten for a long time and asked her for food. She told me where I could find some porridge. I took a bowl over to where a cook was ladling it out with a huge iron spoon.

The cook looked at the last of us and said, 'There is nothing left. When we find some rice we'll cook some more.' I ran to the cook and said, 'Please, you can still get a little bit out of the pot for me.' He poured some water into the pot and washed it out, then poured the water into my bowl, which I drank when I returned to the tent. I was still hungry and thirsty. An old lady told me that I could get ice lollies in the factory on the north side of town. My brother and I set out together.

It was quite a distance. We had to go through the Hebei Coal Mining Institute, the only university in Tangshan. All the campus walls and buildings had collapsed. It was very frightening; there were no people and no sound. The students had not yet left for summer vacation; almost all had been crushed in the collapsed dormitories.

Beyond the campus, we found the caved-in factory. My brother and I squeezed in and discovered several more children. A terrible stench made me feel I was going to pass out. In the half dark, someone was throwing lollies to us. My brother and I each got two dozen and left in a hurry.

As soon as we were outside the rubble, we lay on the ground, taking deep breaths. I was weak and dizzy from the air inside. Each of us ate a lolly and then headed back.

When we got back to our tent, we distributed lollies to the injured who were crying for water. I thought that Elder One must need one too. I grabbed a package and ran to his tent. When I got there he had passed out. I put a lolly on his forehead. He stirred and opened his eyes. After he'd eaten it, Elder One looked as if he were alive again. The same thing happened to Aunt Zhang. Even those with light injuries were seriously endangered, because it was very hot during the day and bitterly cold at night. We had nothing to protect us and nothing to eat or drink.

When the lollies were gone I went back to the factory for more but none were left. I decided to get in the rubble and try anyway. I took a deep breath and held it after I got in. I was able to find some broken lollies.

I decided to take them to Teacher Wang. When I got there, the Wangs were about to leave for the country. There was nothing left in the city apart from dead bodies and caved-in buildings. They didn't

have anything to eat and drink. Teacher Wang was injured in the chest. She was so thirsty that her lips were lined with blisters. She was coughing. Her face was pale. I gave her the broken lollies. When she felt better but with much difficulty, she said, 'We are going to the country. Will you come with us?'

I said no and told her that I should take care of my family. As I answered, I felt I had grown up and that I had saved Elder One, Aunt Zhang, and now my teacher with the lollies.

Before Teacher Wang left, she gave me some dried sweet potatoes, because they would be able to find something to eat in the countryside. I felt so hungry just looking at them but I ran as fast as I could to get them home to my family. Someone fetched water from the pond where people used to wash coal. We put the water and potatoes into a big pot and made porridge and shared it between us all.

When I awoke in the morning, the odour of the bodies had become very strong. I went to see Elder One. People were busy cooking. It turned out that Fat Zhang had dug out some food he had brought back from the cafeteria.

As we were eating, we discussed what to do with Elder One. Finally we decided that he should be sent to hospital somewhere else but there was neither road nor transport. Someone suggested tha we take him to the military airport north of the city. Maybe he coul be saved there. We decided to try.

Fat Zhang didn't agree once he fetched water from the well an saw that the water was black. According to some, the land ha broken up and Tangshan had been separated from the land aroun it. As soon as you got out of the city you would see black wat oozing from underground and would die as soon as you touched t black water. Fat Zhang was scared.

Big Fool's father said, 'Damn it, you're such a coward. Elder On father was good to us all when he was alive. If you won't, I'll deliv him to the airport by myself.' Fat Zhang felt bad because he h been saved by Big Fool and his father so they decided that the th of them would carry Elder One to the airport. I followed. We fo a door on which to carry him.

We woke Elder One and told him that we would take him to airport so that he could be sent to hospital. He said that he wa to see his mother and brothers for the last time. Big Fool and father carried him to the dead bodies. As soon as I saw them I al blacked out. The heads of Da Ma and the children had been crus

Their brains were everywhere. Da Ma was kneeling over the two little ones. When the earthquake came she must have knelt over their heads to protect them with her back. Now, whenever I think about mothers, I think of Da Ma kneeling over the children. When Elder One saw the bodies, he vomited blood. He wanted to throw himself over them. As he rolled over on the stretcher, the shirt that had been covering his lower body fell off. For the first time I saw his broken legs; they had been crushed, the white bones were sticking out and they were infected. We gave him some water to drink and set out. He passed out again. I followed him silently.

On the way we stopped a horse and cart. The old man agreed to let us put the stretcher on it. As we walked along, Big Fool's father asked the old man how many people he had lost in his family. He showed three fingers and said, 'A son, daughter-in-law, and grandson. What about you?'

Big Fool's father pointed at Big Fool and said, 'His mother is gone.' It was as if death was a most natural thing while to be alive was unnatural.

When we got to the airport, we saw a big tent where all the patients had gathered. We carried Elder One there. As I entered, I saw fifty or sixty patients lined up. There were two doctors, their white coats and rubber gloves soaked with blood. The nurses looked the same. The patients were all crying and screaming in their pain.

A nurse asked a doctor, 'What shall we do with number two?'

'Amputate his legs.'

I was frightened. Elder One's case was one of the most serious. Many patients had already died; flies circled round the wounds. Fat Zhang told Big Fool's father that he was very scared and said we'd better leave Elder One there and go away. Big Fool's father answered, 'This isn't a hospital, it's a butcher's shop. The doctors act like they're not treating people but animals. He'll die if we leave him here. Let's carry him out.'

So they carried him out again. Then, led by Big Fool's father, we looked for an aeroplane. The airport was chaotic. We walked around until we saw a helicopter. Its engine was already turning. People were moving boxes of medicine out of it. As the helicopter was about to take off, Big Fool's father asked Fat Zhang to get the stretcher on to it. Fat Zhang hesitated. 'How can we do that? The cadres won't let us.' Big Fool's father pushed Fat Zhang aside and carried the stretcher to the helicopter.

Soldiers there wouldn't let it on, saying, 'If you get on, what about the others that want to get on too?'

Big Fool's father yelled back, 'I don't care. I just want to get this man on. Are you People's Liberation Army?'

'Yes.'

'What kind of people's soldiers are you if you don't save the people?' The soldiers gave in and let the stretcher on; the helicopter took off.

As we returned to the city, we saw a helicopter flying very low and dropping things that fluttered slowly down. Some said that they were food or medicine. We ran after them to the centre of the city where the statue of Chairman Mao had lost its waving arm in the earthquake.

Most of the papers landed on a platform nearby. There I saw seven almost naked men tied together with a steel wire going through the flesh of their shoulders. Blood and flies were all over them. They were panting like animals kneeling on the terraced base of Chairman Mao's statue. But people were not paying them any attention. Sometimes the townspeople would snatch up the papers that landed on these men's bodies; the flies flew up revealing the blood and wounds underneath. The men had all been seriously beaten.

No one else seemed to be disturbed by their plight. People in the square read the papers with excitement. I was shocked. I saw a militiaman – an old worker carrying a gun. He looked very odd with a canvas working jacket, briefs and a pair of tall rubber miner's boots. His hair and wispy beard were grey. He waved a leaflet and crowed, 'Chairman Mao has sent the leaflets.' That was the first time since the earthquake I had seen anyone carrying a gun. I asked him about the kneeling men. *Still reading his leaflet*, he answered, 'Isn't it obvious? These are bad men. They came to the city to steal. They deserve to die.'

Several of these men had a few watches on their arms; now they were being paraded with their takings. I didn't understand why they were being so severely punished; in the earthquake, thousands had died, and nobody was paying attention to their possessions – not even to Fat Zhang's, the wealthiest of us all. I asked cautiously, 'Why are they so severely punished? Because they have stolen some watches?'

The old man turned around and said seriously to me, 'These people stole watches from the dead. Where is their conscience? They think there is no proletarian dictatorship any more after the earthquake.

But the prison system doesn't change – even though the prison walls are down, the prisoners are still prisoners.'

Had my father been treated like these people? In my mind's eye I saw him being sliced by the steel wire through the flesh of his shoulders. I was appalled. People came over to hear the old man's harangue. 'I knew that after the earthquake the class enemies would come out to make trouble. Look at these bad people. They stole watches and things from the dead. They have no proletarian conscience. So long as I, old man Chen, am alive, these people will never succeed. I will stay here!'

The crowd cheered. 'Good, good! Learn from the old hero!' They started to shout slogans.

Just then Fat Zhang came over and said, 'Let's hurry back and show the leaflets to our neighbours, so that they'll be happy too.' When he saw that I was still staring at the kneeling men, he said, 'Don't bother with those thieves. They deserve what they're getting.'

I found it strange he would say that, because he had stolen the food we had had before.

Fat Zhang and others talked excitedly about how Chairman Mao and Premier Hua cared for them and how they'd have food and clothing once the army arrived. Big Fool couldn't read so he didn't understand the excitement. He wanted to find out but kept stammering. Fat Zhang tried to read the leaflet to him but couldn't read well enough to make much sense. The old militiaman and the crowd were still shouting slogans, Fat Zhang and some others were talking heatedly and Big Fool was stammering away. Everyone had gone crazy; only Big Fool was trying his best to keep a clear mind.

Country life at the Orchard Commune, where I had gone with my mother and brother, appeared peaceful and balanced; everyone seemed to be eating and drinking like anyone else. But behind the façade, the crude inequality made me furious. The Party Secretary, Gao Qing, set up a separate tent for his own family. The cook prepared food separately for his family. Although most people had nothing to eat after the earthquake, Gao Qing's family had better food than before because all the relief goods were sent to him first. He invited the other officials to feast and even drink. Once some crackers fell out of a package and a child who lived in our tent grabbed and ate them. The Party secretary criticised his mother for not educating him. I was very angry, but my mother was scared. She

told us repeatedly that children from our kind of family had to be extra cautious.

Gao Qing's family especially disgusted me. Gao Qing always seemed to be either eating or picking his teeth. He put on grand airs when it rained because he was the only one with a cloth raincoat and galoshes; everyone else had only a plastic sheet.

I once stole a look into his canvas tent. There were army blankets, army quilts and army coats. Nobody else had these things. He had big eyes and he was at least a head taller than others. Nobody dared to oppose him. His words were like imperial edicts.

A separate tent was used to store food. The rice was packed in plastic bags, but it was already mouldy. Rats were running everywhere. I saw Gao Qing's wife come in with some friends and help herself to a lot of food; clearly they considered these relief supplies to be their own property.

I liked to play there. Another place I liked to go was the Station for Relief Materials. No one was allowed to look at what was inside the tents. But I liked to sneak in and look at everything – tarpaper, tarpaulins, flashlights, blankets, etc. Now I knew where the things in Gao Qing's family came from.

The education we received from the Party leadership, teachers and parents was the same: we should never take a needle or a piece of thread that was public property. We should preserve our own purity. We must be honest.

I, however, started to eat the fruit on the trees and the biscuits in the tent. I enjoyed this tremendously and did not feel at all guilty.

One bright sunny morning, we returned to Tangshan. As we approached the city, the familiar offensive smell of rotting bodies met us. In our courtyard now was stationed a squad of soldiers. Every day at dawn *the army trumpet* would sound and everyone would get up. An army truck would go around distributing water. Each family got two basinfuls, one for washing and one for drinking. Men worked in the rescue teams round the clock in three shifts. Some built sheds. Women and children picked bricks and tiles from the ruins and cleaned the cement off them to build new houses. Life was busy. Old people cooked and brought food for people working in the ruins. In the evening, people stopped working by the sound of the trumpet.

The mosquitoes came out at night. Each family was allotted a kind of herb which, when burned, could drive them away. But the strong smell and smoke not only drove the mosquitoes away, but made people faint. At night the city was filled with that smoky smell.

CHAPTER FIVE

Mao is Dead

One day in September the loudspeaker, which had been silent for weeks, suddenly came to life. 'Now important news is to be announced; now important news is to be announced.' This one sentence was repeated for half an hour. People gathered on the small playground and asked each other what could have happened. Finally, a heavy voice spoke: 'The great leader of the Chinese People, the founder of the Chinese Communist Party, the great teacher of the Proletarian Revolution of the world, the red sun in the hearts of the Chinese people, the Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, and the Chairman of the Party Military Committee, Comrade Mao Zedong, passed away due to incurable disease in Beijing on 9 September 1976.'

A fearful and deathly silence fell, similar to that in the aftermath of the earthquake. Then a piercing wail broke the silence and people began to cry in deep sorrow.

The news didn't seem true to me. Wasn't it said that Chairman Mao would live ten thousand years? Ever since I had learned to talk, like everyone else I had repeated the formula 'Long live Chairman Mao!' How could he die?

But the grown-ups were wailing, 'Oh, Chairman Mao, how could you leave us like this? What shall we do without you?' 'If not for you,' another said, 'we wouldn't have survived the earthquake. You sent the army to rescue us from our distress. You cannot leave us now!' Others used the widow's formula. 'Chairman, wait for me, let me go with you.' When Nurse Wai grieved – 'My child's father, how can you leave us like this? What can I do now?' – she grieved also for her husband and son, who had died in the earthquake; her little daughter was all she had left.

With the death of Chairman Mao, the last pillar in their hearts collapsed. The first cry broke the dam, and all the pent-up sorrow came pouring out. It was the first public expression of grief since the earthquake, and the crying lasted all day and night.

A few days later, Father's work unit gathered people together on the small playground. First, they played a recording of a memorial service held by the Party Central Committee in Beijing. Then Party Secretary Liu Yuding came up to the platform. He was still wrapped in bandages and wore an army cap. He was the one who had shouted after the earthquake that the atom bomb had been dropped on us.

Now he swept the whole audience with a fierce look and said, 'Comrades, Chairman Mao has passed away. But the proletarian cause will be carried on. Now at this critical moment when people are in grief, some counter-revolutionaries tried to harm socialism and stage a comeback.

'Yesterday we received a shipment of supplies for rebuilding. Just as they arrived at the station, Wang Jian and his son stole a box of biscuits, two blankets, and a piece of tarpaper. These items were not particularly valuable, but this is a new and serious expression of class struggle after the earthquake, an evil attack on our late great leader Chairman Mao. Now haul the counter-revolutionary Wang Jian on to the platform.'

Two militiamen dragged up a short, bespectacled man with a pale face – obviously an intellectual. Secretary Liu looked at him in surprise, and then turned to one of the guards. 'Where is the placard I told you to prepare for him?' he asked.

The militiaman said, 'We couldn't find any cardboard. And besides, we didn't have any writing brush and ink.'

Liu shot a withering look at Wang and said, 'All right, you go without placard because of the earthquake. You're lucky. Let me warn you, Wang Jian, don't you dare think that now Chairman Mao has died, you can stage a comeback. We know your history perfectly well. In 1957 you attacked the Party in a frenzy and became a rightist. In 1966, people thought you had given up evil and returned to good through reform by labour – but now you come out again and try to do evil. But you will never succeed.

'Remember that the Communist Party is here to stay, the Communist power will never yield!' Now he pointed at the audience with a

sweeping gesture. 'Even when all you people here have turned to ashes, this power remains, it will still be a red power. Though Chairman Mao died, remember that Comrade Jiang Qing, Comrade Zhang Chunqiao, Comrade Wang Hongwen, Comrade Yao Wenyuan, are still alive. And our brilliant leader, Premier Hua Guofeng, has been to Tangshan to see us. Let me tell you that Premier Hua Guofeng has called on us to "work hard and rebuild Tangshan in three months". Let me tell you that we have worthy successors to keep the political power.' He ended with a grotesque laugh.

The next day, several new posters appeared: 'Down with Wang Jian!' joined the fading 'Work hard for three months to rebuild the city.'

One day, the loudspeaker again repeated, 'Important news! Important news!' People again gathered, but nothing further came from the loudspeaker. Then a cart approached with a big drum, and a man with bandages on his head and a green army cap on top of it: Liu Yuding again, drumstick in hand, presenting himself as a hero who would not leave the battlefield with a light wound.

'Good news,' he shouted. 'Good news! Our wise leader Hua Guofeng has crushed the conspiracy of the Gang of Four, Traitor Jiang Qing, Traitor Zhang Chunqiao, Traitor Wang Hongwen, and Traitor Yao Wenyuan to usurp Party and state power, and has safeguarded our socialist country. Now the four of them are all in prison. Good news!'

He hit the drum again. Licking his lips and pushing his cap back, he continued excitedly, 'I have always said that Communist power is here to stay; red power will never disappear even though Chairman Mao has died. No matter who they are – Liu Shaoqi, Peng Dehuai, or the Gang of Four – those who go against socialism will be crushed!'

'What was that?' people asked each other. 'What really happened?'

'Have you read the papers lately?'

'Something big must have happened,' one man said. 'We'd better be careful not to say anything yet.'

'Why didn't the radio announce anything, if important things have taken place?' a woman asked. 'Why is it that only Liu Yuding's voice is heard?'

Liu's strident voice was heard again. 'Comrades, we have instructions from above to take part in the parade to celebrate the victorious crushing of the Gang of Four. Tomorrow we will stop work for a day of political study. Now follow me, comrades.'

We set out on the parade, shouting slogans. When we came out of the neighbourhood, we realised that all units had come out to parade. It was already dusk. There were no streets and no street lamps because of the earthquake; a few narrow paths had been cleared through the rubble. People looked like ghosts crowding together in the dark yet there was a kind of excitement in the air. Everyone shouted slogans as loudly as they could. They deliberately hit against each other in the dark. Someone threw a stone on to the cart and frightened the horse. It shied and ran, throwing Liu Yuding from the cart. A commotion ensued. As Liu shouted that this was another expression of class struggle, someone went over and kicked him. People ignored him and marched on shouting slogans. Some lost their way and countless of the crowd lost their shoes; their clothes got torn. Everybody seemed possessed of a desire for destruction.

Days passed. More and more slogans celebrated the overthrow of the Gang of Four. The Kailuan Coal Mine produced the first ton of coal since the earthquake in honour of the great news.

Later I went back to the one-storey house area; people had changed in varying degrees. There was no news of Elder One. Big Fool's father had started to work. Big Fool was now a hero whom everyone respected and no one ridiculed. Aunt Zhang was more popular now and much busier. She went back and forth between the people and the army and was lauded as a good example of supporting the army and their families. Old Foreman had disappeared. It was said that he left Tangshan and was put in an asylum somewhere. I vaguely felt that Old Foreman was all right, though I missed him very much.

A hundred days after the earthquake, we were told to go back to school in the small playground. There were fifty children in our primary school. I looked around and knew no one. An open classroom had been set up in the middle of the playground. Desks and stools were made of bricks held together with clay. At the front a blackboard was propped up. We were surprised to find that the teacher that first day was Bao, principal of the school. Both teachers and students were scared of her. Though she had lost all her family in the earthquake, she looked spirited, because she was going to be videotaped. The lesson that day was very simple. The few words on the blackboard read, 'I love our great leader Chairman Mao. I love Tiananmen in Beijing. I love the People's Liberation Army. We firmly smashed the Gang of Four. Long live Chairman Hua!' We were familiar with the first three slogans, and the last two were not complicated, but Principal Bao made us practise again and again, and we followed her devoutly as if we were reading the Bible.

A fat man from the film crew shouted incessantly in a high-pitched voice, 'Stop. Ready? Start. No, no. Start again. Louder this time.' Bao shouted at the top of her voice and we, too, shouted with all our strength. At last the voice weakened, saying, 'OK, it's over.'

With a big smile, Principal Bao mechanically repeated, 'OK, it's over. School is over.' The fat man disappeared immediately. Some children, still engrossed in the excitement of being filmed, asked, 'Shall we come tomorrow? Are we going to be filmed again? Do we have school tomorrow?'

Principal Bao said, 'Go back and wait for further instructions. Learn from the army when you are at home.'

Students from the higher classes could not wait to go home. They ran away shouting, 'School is over,' not forgetting to give the rickety desks and stools some kicks. The classroom was a mess. Principal Bao sat there looking pale. With the film crew gone, she was a different person. Her smile would never come back. Now she was just one of the Tangshan women who had lost her kin.

Winter was coming. It grew colder. Nothing was more important than acquiring a warm house. After some discussion my family decided to build two more rooms around the house we were given. There were building materials scattered everywhere but we had to collect them. To get steel reinforcing bars for the roof, we had to smash the prefabricated concrete wall panels and take the bars out. My brother and I did this job for days. We each had a big hammer weighing five kilograms and smashed at the panels getting two or three reinforcing bars out of them every day.

We needed bricks for the walls. Bricks lay everywhere, but we had to clean the mortar off them. If we hit them too hard, the bricks would break.

We also needed wood. After the earthquake, no one wanted to use heavy things for roofs and wood was relatively light. Broken furniture was lying about and we sawed it into whatever shapes we needed. Then we started to lay the foundations of the house, propped up the pillars and erected the frame.

To build the walls we needed pure yellow clay to mortar the bricks and dug out a vegetable cellar using the clay as mortar. The mixture would freeze as soon as we poured water into it, so we put broken wheat stalks and tree leaves into the mixture to increase its adhesive qualities and prolong the time before it froze.

In two weeks a brand new house stood in front of us. This was the first time our whole family had ever worked together, and we had two extra rooms. With the completion of our *kang*, the house was finally finished.

My father became well known in that area as an expert *kang* maker. Every day people came to ask him for help. I followed him around and gradually became enchanted by building the *kang*, too. But what enchanted me most was my father. He was like an enigma, a riddle to me. Before the earthquake I had never lived with my parents as a real member of the family. It took me a while to adapt to this new situation, but my trips with my father to build the *kang* helped me understand him better. Everywhere he went, people praised him. He was a good-tempered person and he was good at everything. I began to be proud of him. Few intellectuals could work as well as he and even among the workers, few could match his skills. He was a first-rate bricklayer, an excellent house-builder and an expert in building *kang*.

At home one day I happened to see a worn but fashionable little suitcase that I had never seen before. With an effort I forced open its lock. Inside there was an elegant lining made of black velvet, and several packages wrapped in tissue paper. In one were a few big notebooks. In another I found coloured postcards – pictures of foreign architecture, bridges, and churches, and people in strange costumes. In another package were notebooks with photos in them. The first photo was a young man with glasses and smooth hair wearing a white Western suit. He looked so elegant and handsome. The second was of a pretty young girl; her clear eyes seemed very bright. She had a bow tied around her neck and a white ribbon in her hair. There were several photos of the young man, rowing a boat in one, hunting with a gun. The background of his photos looked the same as that in the postcards. The more I looked the more mysterious I found the people and places in the photos and the more excited I became. Then it dawned on me that the young man must be my father.

I opened another album. This time I found many photos of the woman, my mother, but there were no more exotic and beautiful places and people – each one was Chinese but the background was not Tangshan. Then I opened the third album. On the first page was

a big bank note. There were so many zeros on it I didn't know whether it was ten thousand or a hundred thousand. On it was a strange foreigner with grey hair. I felt as if I had discovered some great treasure. Later, when I read *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *Sherlock Holmes*, and other adventure stories in which the characters discovered great treasure, I would think of this discovery of mine. On the following pages were more bank notes, different from the first one, and coins coloured white, grey, gold and blue. They were thick and beautiful. They looked fantastic to me. Some of the coins had turned green, which made them look as if they were dug up from ancient times.

This discovery made me feel that I had found a great secret. For days I didn't say a word. I went through what I had seen again and again in my mind. I didn't want to go out. Whenever I was alone in the house, I would go and look at those albums.

The more I thought of all this, the more excited I became. Finally I could no longer contain my secret. One day, I told my parents of the small suitcase with the many strange things in it.

Hearing this, my mother became very nervous. 'How could you look at those things? You are only a child.' She was so nervous that she wanted to go that very minute and hide it.

My father's response was different. He said calmly, 'What of it? If the child is interested in those things, let him look at them. Didn't the Cultural Revolution end?'

'Even if it did,' she said, 'he should not have looked at them.'

Their argument puzzled me. What had those things to do with the Cultural Revolution? I said, 'I saw you in the photos.'

'You're quite right.' He ran his hand over his hair, now so white and thin. 'You were sharp to have recognised me. I've changed so much from the man in those photos.'

'What was the place in the pictures?'

'The Soviet Union.'

I couldn't believe it. I asked, 'Isn't the Soviet Union the wors country in the world?'

My father laughed and said, 'Yes, it is the worst country. But it' a beautiful place, and the people are very nice.'

I really could not understand that the worst country could be s beautiful and have nice people. I asked, 'You've been there, haven' you?'

'Yes,' he said. 'I studied abroad for six years.'

'What do you mean by studying abroad? Do all people go and study abroad? Why is it that my mother's photos are different? Those were not the same places.'

My mother laughed and said, 'I didn't study as well as your father. He was very intelligent when he was young. He took the national examination for studying abroad and he was one of the first twenty to go. Only those people could go to study abroad.'

I was so surprised. 'Is that so? How well did you study?' I had no idea what the first twenty of the country meant. 'When you said you studied better than others, is it the same as you make better *kang* than others?'

My father laughed again and answered, 'Well, you could say so. I studied as well as I make *kang* now. At that time people were proud of my achievements in studies, just as my friends are proud of me for making the best *kang*.'

'Your father not only makes the best *kang*, but also was the best nappy-washer, the best coal miner.'

I thought of my Da Pa and said, 'Didn't people say my Da Pa was the best miner in the whole mine?'

The mention of Da Pa depressed all of us. My father said, 'Your Da Pa was such a good person. He was a good well-digger too. The pity was he died too young.' We all kept silent. My parents did not want to talk about anything now.

After a while, I still felt that I couldn't hold back my curiosity and asked, 'What about the money there? Was it like the money the landlords kept for a future comeback?'

My father laughed, 'How absurd! You are still thinking of people staging a comeback. That was Russian money which you saw. It can't be used.'

My mother turned to my father and said, 'Don't say too much to the child. It's not good for him. We don't want another political incident in our family.'

That New Year's Eve, the whole family gathered together to make dumplings. We chopped the vegetables and pork, wrapped the fillings in the dough and boiled them. It was a symbol of happiness in family union. I thought of Old Foreman who had no family, and wanted to go to his shed. My parents told me to come back soon to help make dumplings. I nodded and ran out of the house.

His shed was in the area of the one-storey houses. Many families had already made the fire and started boiling the dumplings. I could

smell the dumplings from a distance. I looked at the spot of ruins where the house of Da Pa and Da Ma had been. It was dark. No one had built sheds on it.

Then, I went to Big Fool's shed. There were just the two of them, Big Fool and his father. The place looked so desolate. Father and son were making dumplings; they were making them seriously but clumsily. There were three sets of bowls and chopsticks on the table. Plates of pig's head meat and peanuts were on the table already. They were happy to see me and asked me to make dumplings and eat with them. Big Fool's father went in and brought out another bowl and chopsticks. I said there were already three sets. He told me that was for Big Fool's mother. Big Fool's father told me that he felt so sorry he had not treated his wife well that he had sworn never to drink again. Tears came to his eyes. Big Fool stammered in tears, 'I miss my mother so much.' I could not help crying too.

After I went back home and we had eaten the dumplings, we sat around the fire enjoying the warmth. We made some tea and cracked watermelon seeds in our mouths while chatting on the *kang*. We also opened a bottle of rice wine. My father, brother and I all had red faces after just a little. My mother had even less as the doctor did not allow her to drink.

Everyone was in high spirits, so I brought up my questions about the postcards and photos again. My brother did not know what I was talking about, but that night they were willing to answer our questions. We talked the whole night.

They told us about their childhood, their courtship – theirs was love at first sight at Beidaihe, a seaside resort on the north-east coast, their wedding after my father came back from studying in the Soviet Union. The marriage was opposed by many of their relatives, but my parents ignored them. Then they told us of the difficulty of bringing me into the world and how I looked when I entered it. They also told us about the radio incident – my father listening to a Soviet radio station and being labelled a spy, his working in the mine, and many other things. My mother talked about her life in the May Seventh Cadre School, where intellectuals and cadres were sent to do farm work as a form of ideological remoulding. We were no longer frightened talking about the landlord background or my father being a spy.

After that New Year's Eve, the old wall between my parents and me disappeared but a new one was erected. The life they described to me seemed so different from mine. It was a mystery to me. They were proud of their life in the fifties. It sounded like another world. I felt I could learn a lot from them. In the family of Da Pa and Da Ma, I had felt many things but I could not talk to them. They would not have been able to answer my questions because very often they did not know the answers. When I asked my parents questions, they answered me frankly.

From that night, I felt I had a home, a father and mother. And I felt I had a history and a certain goal.

Spring came, and with it rumours began to spread about an outbreak of cholera. Once it was discovered that people had cholera, a whole street would be blocked off. The army watched over it. People were scared. Another order came to gather all the dead in one place. A third of the people in Tangshan died, over 300,000. Bodies were scattered everywhere. Some were buried near their houses, some under the houses, some in the streets, some in the villages.

The crematorium had been damaged by the earthquake but it was not possible to burn so many bodies anyway. The order was given to dig several big pits and bury the dead. Soldiers worked day and night moving the bodies from their original graves to the big holes before the weather got warm.

I took part in one reburial. First the family of the dead went with the soldiers and the rescue team who dug up the graves. They used a hook to get the shrunken body out and immediately put it into a sterilised bag and threw it on to a truck. Then the procession would follow the truck. They walked on and on – the road seemed endless – until they got to a hillside.

There I saw a huge deep hole, more than a hundred metres long, fifty wide and twenty deep. A dozen bulldozers came and pressed the bodies, then spread lime evenly over them. Finally a row of road rollers drove slowly over it. Then the whole process was repeated and another batch of bodies buried. The process went on and on.

Around the pit on the hills stood crowds of people. The place was filled with the sound of crying. One person after another, one grimacing face after another, one body after another swelled in my mind. The weather was still chilly. The wind was blowing. I came down the hill and walked on and did not know where I was going.

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I decided to go to my kindergarten which was nothing but ruins now. No one was there. I tried to find the ruins I had discovered years ago but failed as there were ruins everywhere now.

Then I went to my castle. Only one wall was left erect. Standing there I thought of Little Five, Little Six and my childhood friends. I also thought of Old Foreman and what he told us about the castle. I walked round the castle and came to the wall. This was the place where the announcement of the sentence of the young couple was made. I thought of the woman with the shoes round her neck.

The remnant of a slogan was still daubed here: 'Go all-out and rebuild a new Tangshan in three months.' The paint on the slogan had peeled and the words were hardly distinguishable. It was an old slogan.

I envied Old Foreman because he had found his paradise. But where was my paradise? Where should I go next? Suddenly I remembered a talk with my father. He had been very busy recently; one night I was woken up by him coming back from coaching students and potential leaders. 'You look so happy these days, Father.'

'Yes,' he said. 'I'm happy. The national college entrance exam has resumed; other regulations and rules will also be resumed soon. It seems the world is changing.'

I asked, 'What is a college entrance exam?'

He said, 'Any young person who wants to enter college has to pass an exam. It is a kind of competition.'

'What is competition?' I asked.

'Competition means you work hard and society will give you your reward.'

I still didn't quite understand. I thought for a while and asked again, 'Is competition a good thing?'

'Of course it is,' he said.

'Why wasn't there competition before?'

He sighed and said, 'Let's not talk about before. Now everything is changing for the good. Little Lu, you should work hard to prepare for your future.'

'What will the changes be?'

'It's simple,' he said. 'Our country needs science. Do you know what science is?' I shook my head. The word 'science' was new to me.

When he mentioned this word, he looked radiant. He said, 'For example, I make good *kang*. There is science in it. When I build a house, I have to draw a design. This is also science. The research I did and the machines I made before were all science. Science is something that can change our life and make it better. If we want to change our country for the better, we need science.'

Science seemed both close and far away to me. I asked, 'How can we acquire science?'

He answered, 'That's simple. Go to college and study hard.' He went to bed, and I dropped off to sleep again.

Now I remembered this talk, and the last sentence repeated itself constantly. I now knew what I wanted to do. 'I want to go to college.' I had found my road to paradise. I became excited and nervous, too. As I ran back home, I kept saying to myself, 'I want to go to college; I want to study.'

CHAPTER SIX

Education

One night my father came home from work with a puzzled, serious look on his face. He sat down to read a pamphlet. He nodded several times. At supper he told us a story.

A colleague of his had returned home one day to find her son, a third-grader, reading a little pamphlet with great interest. This sparked off her curiosity, and she went over and asked him what he was doing. The boy said, 'Our teacher told us that we would have to start writing compositions soon, and that if we wanted to write good compositions we should read this pamphlet. We're supposed to read the pieces in it and try to memorise them.' The mother was surprised and asked, 'What book is it that you're reading?' The boy answered, 'It's *Selected Essays* by Li Lu.' 'And who is Li Lu?' she asked. The boy shot a surprised glance at his mother. 'You mean you don't know who Li Lu is?' Only later did she discover that Li Lu was the son of Li Rui He, who worked in the same office with her. And it was through her that my father learned of it.

It was 1979 and everything had just started afresh. The Cultural Revolution had been declared a mistake and the reform movement had begun. The earthquake had created a special environment in Tangshan. My parents were very busy; they were again devoting all their energy to their work and had no time for my brother and me. After the earthquake I began to enjoy studying but I seldom stayed at home. I read and did my homework in my classmates' homes. Yet to my parents I was still the naughty boy who fought in the streets and made trouble and was not interested in studying. I could well imagine why they were so amazed when they read the collection of my compositions. This wasn't the first time that they had seen their son as a promising student. I had surprised them a year earlier with my performance in the first composition and maths competition held in Tangshan.

More than a hundred thousand schoolchildren from Tangshan and surrounding counties took part in the competition. I was then in the fourth grade, and I came fourth in composition, sixth in oration and among the first twenty in maths. Our school took five awards altogether and I myself got three of them. The school immediately took notice of me. People could not understand how I was able to make such great progress in such a short time. The year before I was still a wild street boy, and now the school was suddenly delighted to have me.

Perhaps my parents thought it was an accident that I did so well. During the Cultural Revolution many spurious student 'heroes' emerged and my parents were sceptical of school competitions. One student became well known throughout the country because he handed in a blank paper for his exam, another for her diary criticising her teacher for not teaching politics. My parents hadn't noticed the tremendous progress I had made but their discovery of my essays showed them my potential because they read and were moved by what I had written.

The one person who was not surprised at my accomplishment was my grandmother. A few years earlier, when I was six or seven, I had stayed with her for a while in Ji'nan in Shandong province. Once on the way to a relative's house we were separated and I made my way there alone. My grandmother was so impressed that she declared to everyone that I was no ordinary child.

She was working now at a school reception desk. We would get up at the same time, have breakfast and then go to school together. I became a junior receptionist. I had a pleasant time with her but many of the neighbours spoke ill of her. She had once been the principal of a model school during the pre-1949 Kuomintang days and a member of the Kuomintang legislative committee. Because of that she spent twenty years in prison. I could not imagine what my grandmother, such a kind and easy-going person, had to do with counter-revolutionaries. All I knew was that she had a bad back and limped when she walked. And her fingers were so stiff that she could not bend them. The neighbours said this dated from her time in prison. But she never told me about it. She was the first person who encouraged me and it was she who liberated me from my sense of inferiority and loneliness and let me begin to realise my talents.

Not long after the 'publication' of my school essays I had to take the entrance exams for junior middle. For the composition after reading a text we were to write our impressions of a socialist hero.

Two weeks later the results arrived. I was one point below a pass, which kept me from entering Middle School No. 15, one of the better schools in the city. My primary school teachers felt worse about it than I did. They thought there must be something wrong. They gathered my compositions and the awards I had won, went to the principal of Middle School No. 15 and told him all about me.

Teacher Wang said that she could pledge the honour of her school and her own honour as a teacher of more than thirty years on my being one of the top students in her school and of a rare intelligence. The principal was intrigued, and as he had a certain amount of discretion in selecting his students, I was admitted.

The first thing you met when you went through the gates of Middle School No. 15 were the sports fields. Behind them were rows of small houses used for classrooms and to the rear of the classrooms were more rows of houses where teachers and staff lived. Beyond those were wheatfields and vegetable gardens, about five acres in all.

I liked to take walks in the vegetable gardens. Every day I saw a tall young woman learning to walk on crutches. We would smile at each other. She looked familiar to me and we started to talk. She said, 'You're Li Lu, aren't you? My little sister shares a desk with you. She often tells us about you, and how clever you are. You've become quite a mysterious figure to me.' I could not imagine how the silent girl who sat beside me could have admired me so much. She was so quiet, she didn't even say thank you when I picked up her pencil from the floor.

The woman with the crutches told me that she worked in the school's new library. 'Come and see the library,' she said to me. 'I'll introduce you to some books.' I was tired of my lessons and gladly accepted. It astonished me to see so many books all at once – thousands of them! I had never seen so many books in my life before.

Teacher Han, as I came to call her, later told me that she managed the library herself. She had collected books from everywhere to set it up, many of which were volumes that the Red Guards had confiscated during the Cultural Revolution. Now these books were being given to key schools and Han had acquired a number of them for our library. They were published before the Cultural Revolution and were very important books, though not meant for schoolchildren. There was also a number of banned books.

For the first time I read works by masters such as Victor Hugo, Gorky, Tolstoy, Lermontov, Sholokhov, Balzac. Everything was new to me. I associated what I read now with what I found in my parents' albums. In books I could travel to every corner of the world and communicate with the people there.

Around this time I discovered a pigsty beside the vegetable garden. The earthquake had smashed a row of houses and the remaining corner had been turned into a pigsty. Now seven or eight little pigs lived there among the ruins, trees and weeds. No one went there but a cook who fed them once a day. I loved the serenity of the place and sat there with a book almost every day.

On Sundays the school was empty, which suited me perfectly. I did not go home, preferring to wander about in the emptiness. I would take a book and read all day long beside the pigsty.

Middle School No. 15 was a boarding-school. We were woken at half past six every morning by the first bell. The second bell sent us out to run, the third signalled breakfast, the fourth was for getting ready to study, and the fifth announced the start of lessons at half past seven. We were allowed ten minutes to get up and make our beds, ten to fifteen minutes for running, twenty minutes for breakfast. Before the teacher arrived, students could read anything as long as they sat in the classroom. There were four classes in the morning; after the first two we had a twenty-minute break for exercise.

After the fourth class we went to the dining hall for lunch. Then we had a nap in our dormitory. Some free time was granted after class and before supper. After twenty minutes or so for supper, evening studies began which lasted two hours, until half past nine. At ten the bell rang again for everyone to be in bed. All the lights went out until the next morning, and teachers would patrol the rooms to make sure not a sound was made. It was almost like the prison life of my old kindergarten.

Our food was very simple, because we paid so little for it. Each student, big and small, got the same portion. For breakfast we had a conical corn bun, a 'golden pagoda' we called it, an ironic name for this evil-tasting food. Besides the corn bun, each had a bowl of corn gruel and some pickles. For lunch there were two buns or corn cakes and a dish made mostly from Chinese cabbage. Sometimes there were some thin slices of meat or bits of fat among the cabbage.

Once a week we had a dish with a little more meat in it. Sometimes there was bean curd. Supper was lighter than lunch; it was more or less the same as breakfast, but with the leftovers from lunch. We never had enough food. Students looked forward to going home at weekends for a treat, though I chose to stay at school usually telling my parents that I wanted to review my assignments.

Nobody knew where I went after class. I rarely took part in the general discussion in the dormitory. I read my own books during morning and evening review classes and seldom did my homework. My grades for the exams were something of a joke. Sometimes I came first in the class and sometimes last.

Then one day in our school a demonstration class in composition was held. Our teacher was considered an authority and clearly it was an important day for him. Fifty or sixty teachers came from all over the city to attend as observers. The class went smoothly and the teacher had covered practically all that he had planned. There were still about fifteen minutes left before the class ended and he asked us each to construct an outline for a composition using the methods we had just learned, and to tell the class the way the outline was formed. He had never asked us to do anything like this before. Both the students and the visiting teachers stared at each other in astonishment. Normally the questions we answered in class and in our exams required no originality.

Several minutes passed. No one put up a hand. In his embarrassment the teacher looked at me. I neither liked this teacher nor his class very much but I felt that someone should answer the question as it was better than the standard ones. As I walked to the front of the room, I recognised different looks coming my way, some surprised, some grateful and some jealous. It was strange standing before so many people and there were more teachers present than students. For a full minute I stood there without saying a word. It was less a feeling of nervousness than of indescribable strangeness. Most of the friends I had made in books had had the experience of talking to a large audience and they weren't nervous. But I had never spoken before so many people. I did not know how to start. I saw some contemptuous looks among the audience. I could not stand the humiliation. I said to myself, 'For good or worse, say aloud what you have said to yourself. Just tell what is in your heart.' I started to speak. I told a true story about Candle, a country boy at the school who, when he learns that his parents cannot afford to keep him there, goes without food at weekends to save money and studies late by candlelight to be sure to succeed. When he collapses one weekend, his classmates learn his story and take up a collection to pay his expenses. It was an ordinary story, but I put feeling into it. I talked for about ten minutes.

For a few seconds after I finished silence reigned in the room – then thunderous applause. The teacher came over to embrace me and said, 'Li Lu, what you said was not an outline, but a complete composition in itself.' This was the first time I had told others what I truly thought and felt. Until then I had never communicated my feelings and thoughts. I had only talked to myself. From then on I made it a principle that whenever I made a speech, I would try to voice my true feelings. If you are confident that you can move yourself, you will be sure to move others.

One spring day at noon during nap time I was reading a novel. Another student, Chen Lei, was also reading. Suddenly he let out a terrified scream. When I rushed over to see why he was so frightened, I saw our principal Yang standing right by Chen's bed. Chen's book was in the principal's hand! His face had turned deathly pale.

People spoke well of Yang but I never liked him. He was too rigid; he wanted to form every student from the same mould. His only criteria to determine a good student were that he observed discipline, studied hard, loved labour, and obeyed the teachers. He demanded good grades but never independent thinking and creativity. He wanted to produce students who could give the standard answers to the standard questions. It didn't matter to him whether they really understood the essence of a subject. Nevertheless, I respected him because I heard that he had struggled bravely against the Gang of Four during the Cultural Revolution.

I couldn't understand why Chen Lei was so frightened. He begged the principal, 'Oh, please, Principal Yang, give the notebook back to me. This will never happen again. I will never read at nap time again.'

Everyone was now wide awake. Principal Yang lowered his head and glanced at the notebook, and immediately his face changed colour. Chen Lei was crying now. Yang was about to turn and go, but Chen seized his hand while kneeling in bed. He said, 'I'll never do this again. Never.'

Yang broke away, and came up to me and took away my book. I said nothing and let him take the book. He said, 'Don't go to class after the nap. Come to my office. You too, Chen Lei, come to my office.'

When class started, we went to the principal's office. On the way I asked Chen Lei, 'Why are you so frightened? What book was it?'

Chen just repeated, 'I'm finished. I'm finished.'

The principal was already waiting for us when we got there. He took Chen Lei to another room and talked to him. He told me to stand by the door. Instead, I found myself a seat and started reading a newspaper. It was at least two or three hours before Principal Yang came out. I thought everything was all right because when he came out I was standing again but I soon learned he had peeked out several times and saw that I was sitting and reading.

Now we were face to face. He showered his abuse on me. It was not until then that I saw there was a real art in cursing. I was surprised that he knew all the bad things I had done. I paid little attention to hygiene and was always in rags; I was not attentive in class and didn't do my homework; I was lazy and didn't get up on time. I wished a hole would open up in the floor so that I could escape this stream of invective. He summed up by saying that I was an arrogant and conceited student who did not respect his teachers. He added that I was dishonest. He had told me to stand there but I had sat down and read the newspaper.

He carried on for two full hours. I began to think that what he was saying about me was true. The Party provided us with such good opportunities. We could study without paying tuition but I never took my studies seriously. I did not work hard and cared little about my grades. I did not respect the teachers' work. I seemed to lose the ability to speak.

Finally he asked me, 'Are you aware that something serious is happening in your class?' I was astonished and said that I wasn't. 'Your class is being destroyed by the most poisonous drug in the world.'

'What is it?' I asked. 'Why is it so poisonous?'

He said, 'Do you know what Chen Lei was reading?'

'No, I really don't know,' I answered.

He said, 'Chen Lei was reading a "yellow" book.'

I was absolutely shocked. In those days books about sex were considered to be the most poisonous. I had never read any of them and did not know what was actually in them. 'Yellow' books stirred up the most evil instincts in human beings and inspired them to commit crimes. The title of the book Chen Lei was reading was *The Heart of a Young Lady*. I read it several years later. It told of a young girl's love affair with a man and contained a detailed description of their making love for the first time.

'Look at what a dangerous path you are taking. If you go on like this, you will end up like Chen Lei reading "yellow" books.' Now I was really frightened. I admitted my failings. Yang saw the change in me and ordered me to write a self-criticism on the spot. I wrote for nearly two hours. It was completely dark when I finished. As he took away my self-criticism, I noticed for a brief moment an almost invisible smile at the corner of his mouth. It was a strange smile. Perhaps I was too sensitive, but I felt it was a smile of victory. I suddenly realised he took me for a rival. That was why he knew everything about me, including the most trivial things.

When I left the principal's office I was frustrated and depressed. People were getting ready to go to bed when I went back to my room. After the light was put out, people started talking about the afternoon. Some asked what had happened to me and what the principal had said. I did not answer. My mind was racing and I found it hard to calm it. Then people asked Chen Lei. He didn't say anything either. He sat on his bed and began to cry. Some tried to comfort Chen. Later I found out that Chen hand-copied the book from a friend of his. Quite a few students in our room had read it. He had read it several times.

After I finished junior middle school, I had no way of borrowing books to read. I grew bored and listless. At the same time I had a strong desire to find out more about my past. First I went to Zhangdali to visit the old couple who took me in when I was six months old when my parents couldn't take care of me during the Cultural Revolution. I took the bus and then walked a long way.

Finally at dusk I found the place. Some people were eating outside from a big bowl at the corner of a wall. The old couple lived in a small room. Its walls were black; on the stove was a pot with some cold porridge in it. Two old people sat on the *kang*, fanning each other. The eyes of the old man were clouded; he was almost blind. This was the first time I had gone back to see them since I left.

I greeted them and explained that I was one of the children they had taken in. The old man and woman looked at each other; it was a while before they remembered anything about me. I was deeply hurt. I took out the sweet cakes I brought for them. They were very grateful and started to talk to me. I wanted to know what I was like as a baby, and how they came to take me in. They vaguely remembered taking in a baby. The only impression they had of my mother was that she was a good woman.

I asked my grandmother about her past. She had been labelled a counter-revolutionary and was still in prison in the early 1960s. She refused to tell me anything about that. We talked a great deal together, but she told me nothing of her early life and sufferings as if she had forgotten them. When I insisted, she told me her motto: 'Strive hard to be stupid.' By that time my grandmother and parents were all rehabilitated. But I felt there were too many things they did not want to tell me.

I went to see Big Fool's father and through him I visited many old workers. I tried to find out what life was like in the mines, what kind of person Old Foreman was and whether he was like the foremen described in the standard novels. But they disappointed me. What those old people remembered seemed so trivial – the taste of the wine, fighting with bricks not knives. They were incapable of comparing the two different times; there seemed almost no distinction between the two in their thinking. The past remained a mystery to me.

At last I found an old man who had been Da Pa's master. He told me how the fatal gas explosion happened. Xiao Lan, the Party secretary of the Kailuan coal mine, had set up the 'hundred-day competition' activity – one hundred continuous days of work without a day off. Speed was vital, and safety measures grossly neglected. A few days before the accident, Da Pa had talked to the person in charge of safety about the danger. The day before the accident Da Pa and his master had a drink together. They complained that the administrators only knew politics, not technology: they were worse than the foremen in the past. The old man never saw Da Pa again.

The old man seemed very lonely; tears ran down his face. I often went back to talk to him. Later I asked whether he knew of a young couple who were put in prison. No one seemed to remember it clearly, but I had never erased from my mind the picture of the young woman with worn-out shoes round her neck. To my surprise, the old man knew all about the young couple. The girl's father lived nearby. He was like Big Fool's father, drunk and loud all the time. His wife died long before but he had this daughter, who was very pretty. She fell in love with a boy at school. However, as the father was heavily in debt on account of his drinking and gambling, he promised to marry his daughter to the son of a leader of the mine in exchange for generous betrothal gifts.

The young lovers were desperate and wanted to meet secretly. They came to our castle but the father followed his daughter and discovered them making love in their secret place. The betrothal gifts were returned and the young couple were expelled from school and tried for their 'crimes'. Even so, they promised to wait for each other until the boy came out of prison.

The boy behaved very well in prison and there was a possibility of reducing his time. But the earthquake came and the prison walls collapsed, and he ran to the girl's home. He rescued the father from the ruins, but the girl was dead. His grief was beyond description and he returned to the prison. His sentence was doubled for running away. He was still serving his sentence in prison even then. The old man was silent for a long time after he finished the story. The only sound came from the pipe he was smoking. I let out a long sigh. 'Where is the girl's father now?' I asked quietly.

'He's still drinking,' the old man answered after filling his pipe with tobacco.

I walked to the castle and through the ruins hoping to find something that marked the incident, maybe just a little piece of blood-smeared paper. But I found nothing. All evidence disappears with the passage of time.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Senior Middle School

When I went back to school, Tangshan No. 1 Middle School had not changed much in decades. Boys and girls had little contact. Learning was by rote. Older people didn't seem to remember anything of the past; they had never considered change; they had never doubted much.

There was very little intellectual discussion; the students laughed at any talk of ideals or philosophy – that was book stuff. This attitude had been handed down for generations. Few questioned the status quo.

However, some change took place in the school. The Cultural Revolution was now under attack, and the open-door policy had been implemented. The periodicals were filled with news stories and reports and change was in the air all over the country except in Tangshan, which remained lifeless and stagnant. Newspapers carried reports on educational reforms, though there were no echoes in the schools of Tangshan. And there were students, even among those who did not discuss ideals, who were not totally unconcerned about these issues. They were thinking about and questioning things just as I was.

I was reading *The Atom in My Family* by Fermi's wife as well as stories on young Einstein and his Olympia Club. I thought we should have a Chinese Olympia Club to read and discuss the problems of our generation, its development, the reforms, China and its future. My friends agreed and we began to organise a group. I thought we should recruit female students – a revolutionary idea. I went from class to class to ask about likely candidates. Xiao Ling was the first to be recommended. I sensed the rebellious spirit in her. Once she talked of her father, a miner, and her mother, an aide in a kindergarten. I could see she was trying very hard to break free of the influence of her family and upbringing. She said she wanted to find a land far away that would let her grow, where she could settle down and start afresh.

Many years later, Xiao Ling attended Beijing University. Once when I went to see her, we went walking in the Summer Palace and she talked of her present life with excitement and joy. She was the hostess of a circle of educated people from families of well-known intellectuals. She had found the land that let her grow.

Two others were recommended to me. Ping Ping was a quiet girl, but she wrote lively and exciting articles. Mai Yan played the violin and did very well in her studies, too. She was pretty; many people liked her. I plucked up courage to talk to them. They agreed to join our group.

One Sunday the group met for the first time and we decided to call it Stream, because both our quietness and persistence would flow like a stream. On the top floor of our classroom building was an empty room. Every Sunday the boys would climb in through the window and open the door to let everyone in. Then we would bolt it and cover the windows with newspapers so that nothing could be seen or heard from outside. Our meetings seemed so exciting and mysterious. It was the first time boys and girls could get together to discuss things – an exciting novelty for Chinese adolescents. Mai Yan said if our group became known to outsiders, we would be attacked; her parents and sisters would call her a loose woman. Though she looked elegant, she was from a miner's family that had little education and was trying to find the way to a different life.

We agreed that the group must be kept secret. Our discussions blossomed; people became lively and creative.

Once we left Stream and went back to reality, however, we had to pretend that we did not know each other. We would meet by chance in the corridor, and if anyone else was there we would pass as strangers. Even if no one else was around, we dared not stop to talk. Someone might turn up out of the blue.

We discussed everything. Xiao Ling concentrated on the present educational system, which she thought was damaging people's creativity and potential: it suppressed human nature; at school students were slaves and teachers were gods. Ping Ping was interested in literature and said that a revolution had taken place in creative writing since the end of the Cultural Revolution; she recommended many new works and was especially drawn to the 'misty poetry', which sought to liberate human nature instead of eulogising the Party and Chairman Mao.

Little Bean led us to a broader vision of the universe. He was fascinated by natural science and philosophy; the rest of us thought less deeply in the natural sciences. Little Bean often complained to me that Stream was still far from the Olympia Club. Still, something was better than nothing: Stream at least let our fantasies wander freely.

Mostly we discussed our own generation. We all thought the political education given to us, like religious doctrine, had lost its credibility. We doubted that we were really marching towards communism – and what were communism and Marxism, anyway?

Our attention turned towards Europe, the United States, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong. In the past forty years, their living standards had risen to incredible heights. But what about us? We knew the educational system was no good, but we were not very clear as to what a good one should offer.

In the first intelligence test of the primary and middle schools in Tangshan, our school came first. Of the five major participants from our school who won major awards, three (including me) were in Stream. The new volleyball team of our school was third in the city tournament and three of the team were in Stream. In the city singing contest, our school chorus, the only one without a big orchestra or splendid uniforms, got the first award. Our only accompaniment was an old accordion. Everyone in Stream was in the chorus, and I was the conductor.

What shook the school was Stream's involvement in the school congress. Before the congress, Hua Limin, the head of the official students' union in our schools, came to the members of Stream though I did not know how he learned about us. He talked to us about his plan to reform the students' union. It needed reform; it seldom sponsored activities, and few people knew that a students' union existed. It was largely symbolic, and its leaders were appointed by political instructors. Yet, according to its constitution, the students' union was a broad organisation for all students, and every student had the right to vote and be elected. Stream decided to use these regulations and hold a students' congress that genuinely represented the students.

We discussed goals, strategies and tactics. We also talked about where to hold the congress, what should be included in the general report, and how to hold the election. Hua was our organiser and the liaison between us and the school administration. Such communication was important. With their consent, we took over the school broadcasting station, which until then had only broadcast the official news at 6.30 a.m. and pop songs at supper time. I was head of the station; the editors came from Stream. First we revised the broadcasting schedule and included campus news, current affairs and music including classical Western music. On the campus news segment, we reported the goals, purposes, slogans and agenda of the students' congress. In current affairs, we informed people of the reforms being carried out all over the country.

The goals of the congress were self-government and self-management: we should organise everything ourselves, make our own decisions on matters concerning us as students and conduct our own elections. Self-management meant students should take care of their own affairs individually. Soon the congress became one of the most popular topics of student conversation.

It opened on Sunday, entirely arranged by students. We recorded it for those who could not be there; I carried a cassette recorder round the hall interviewing people in every corner.

I interviewed Xiao Di, the student who suggested that the school should set up handicraft courses. Excited, he said, 'I'm grateful that my class sent me to the congress. I felt I was not qualified, because I got such poor grades. But after I heard your broadcast, I realised that everyone should have the right to voice their ideas. No longer am I ashamed. I can raise my head high. I am grateful to you for giving me confidence. I know now that if I don't get into college, I can still have a future and be useful to society.' Usually my reports included such an interview, excerpts from important speeches, my comments and some jokes. The broadcast was a great success, and I became a school celebrity.

Stream became famous, as did the student work in our school. Schools from seven cities and provinces visited our school to learn from us. The newspaper reported what good work we had done. One of the directors in charge of student work was promoted to work in the City Educational Bureau. Hua Limin got into college without taking any examination. However, our actual proposals were ignored.

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Three teachers influenced me deeply during these years and helped me understand better the trials and conflicts of their generation. The first was my physics teacher, Su Ji. He always wore a faded Mao suit; his hair and moustache were long and seldom trimmed. Although he was only a little over thirty, he looked older. He did not have a set pattern for his class, and talked casually. Sometimes he would pull up a chair, sit down and tell us stories. He never asked us to memorise anything, he wanted us to think for ourselves. The most difficult thing, he said, was to develop the right way of thinking. The best method was to study how the great scientists had established the laws of physics. He did not explain problems and did not ask the students to do exercises. Some complained about him to the school administration. Su was deprived of the right to teach for a year. At first he sat calmly listening to the criticism but gradually his face went pale.

I stood up and voiced my own ideas about Su. 'Su has his defects in teaching, since he has just started teaching. But his stress on the methods and the way of thinking in physics is an important reform in teaching. He has grasped the essence of physics. If we know the right way of thinking in physics, it will not be hard to do those exercises.' The meeting lasted two hours, and in the end Su Ji looked ashamed and helpless. He said he had wanted to try out some reforms. Now he felt very sorry that he had hurt his students without knowing it.

Later we met by chance on the road. He said, 'You have talents in physics, but you cannot study here in China. You should go to the United States. Study and research need an atmosphere of free inquiry. You will certainly do well there.' He told me some of his agonies. He had wanted to create a theory of his own, but every time he failed. He wanted to be a good teacher, but this hope was now crushed. He wanted to study in the United States. Underneath his casual behaviour was a serious, conscientious and hopeful attitude towards life.

Lao Han was our chemistry teacher. Already over fifty, he often wore a traditional Chinese jacket, sometimes blue, sometimes grey, and baggy pants. His glasses were old-fashioned. He could have passed for a country accountant but for the striking red, green and blue scarf, which he always wore with one end on his chest and the other casually flipped over his shoulder. With hands behind his back, he walked slowly from one end of the campus to the other, from one side of the classroom to the other. He spoke so slowly that I often feared he might never finish.

The more we talked, the more his amazingly wide range of knowledge struck me and we became close. Because of him I began to develop an interest in chemistry. I grew increasingly interested in his bookshelves. He had a tremendous variety of books and magazines, but why should he still be reading when he was already so well read? He slept only five hours a day. One night he told me his story.

'I was born in a peasant family in a remote village. For generations my family tilled the land. When I was ten, the People's Liberation Army came and announced that our village was liberated. Everyone would have a chance to study. I already knew that I wanted to learn new things, and eventually I got into college.

'The first day there I met a kindly old professor. He told me of the wonders of chemistry, and that the country needed chemists.' Lao Han visited his professor's home, and discovered that the widowed professor had a beautiful daughter. 'Despite my professor's kindness, I felt out of place in that elegant bourgeois environment. My clothes were rough, my manners uncouth. When his daughter appeared, the room seemed brighter. Her long hair was tied with a red, green and blue silk ribbon.'

Later he wanted to visit the professor's home to see his daughter, but felt he was unworthy of her love. 'The only thing I could offer was my youth and vigour. I could work hard and study well. So I slept only four or five hours a day and I read continuously. When I was tired, I thought of her beautiful fairy-like image and felt full of energy.'

But his results were not satisfactory. The old professor told him that he needed to improve his scientific methods, and recommended several books. 'I read them and became fascinated by science. Now and then I would dream of my fairy image. Yet every time I saw her, I felt embarrassed. My shabby clothes, my manners, and my looks – nothing was her match.'

Saying this he pointed to his broad red nose and laughed. 'She occupied all my dreams, but I had never said a word to her. Then she married a graduate student of her father's. I knew the groom but did not like him. He was modest and polite, but there was something wrong with him. Perhaps his lips were too thin.

'The news of her marriage was a blow. I rushed away from school after I graduated, hoping to go as far away as possible.' He went

back to his village and began teaching there. Later his parents arranged a marriage, and the couple eventually had children.

'Though I was in a remote village, I did not forget my professor. His attitude towards science still inspired me. I spent all my money on books and equipment for experiments. I continued my research in that out of the way place. My interest broadened. I realised there was another world outside this one. Gradually my sadness faded.

'Then came the Cultural Revolution. I had always believed what the Communist Party said was right and what they did was good. However, I found that I, like many other intellectuals, soon became the target of criticism. Because of my working-class background, I was not seriously persecuted. But I was worried about my professor. As the situation grew worse, I kept hearing news of intellectuals committing suicide, being persecuted to death.

'In the summer of 1967 I went back to my university. My professor had been one of the earliest to be labelled a counter-revolutionary intellectual. His son-in-law was the first to put up big-character posters criticising both his father-in-law and wife for their deep-rooted bourgeois ideology. For that he was praised.

'Later both father and daughter were sent to Xinjiang province in the far west so I rushed there. It took me a week to get there, and more time searching for them. When I found the place, I was told the two of them had committed suicide.

'When I came home, I was changed. I kept silent all day. I avoided the Cultural Revolution and the Party. I devoted all my energy and time to my research. When I was told to attend a political meeting, I said I was sick. Again my excellent family background saved me from being bothered.

'The ten years of the Cultural Revolution gave me time to read and do my research. After the Cultural Revolution, when people started to lay emphasis on scholarship, I was brought out as an authority in my field. I found it so ridiculous.'

Momentarily lost in thought, he opened a locked drawer. Inside was an old album, with only one photo in it, of about thirty college students. In the middle were an old man in a Western-style suit and a very young girl in a traditional Chinese dress. There was a beautiful scarf around her neck; one end hung loosely on her chest and the other was casually thrown over her shoulder.

Tan taught music. He wore a well-cut Mao suit and well-polished shoes. His thin face was handsome with clear features and large eyes, and his long hair and moustache were neatly groomed. He had long arms and fingers, perfect for playing the piano.

There was a small two-storey building at our school with the physical training offices downstairs and the music rooms upstairs. Beethoven, Chopin, Mozart and Liszt stared down from the walls. Tan had a lot of green plants in the room, but no flowers; he did not like them. When he taught he always held a baton. His score lay on the desk in front; now and then he would walk to it and flip a page with his baton. Sometimes he would sit at the piano and play, or pick up the violin. He introduced us to classical music, including Western classical music, ancient Chinese music, and even Beijing opera. Every time he introduced a piece of music, he looked intoxicated.

I asked him why he had been assigned to do administrative work.

'It's hard to tell you in just a few words.'

After failing the national college entrance exams, he went to a music teachers' training school, where he fell in love with Western music. Soon he became its most prominent student and ultimately began to teach music in the best middle school in Tangshan.

I had never imagined that he was from the country; I assumed he was from a family of musicians. But his background made his attitude towards the leaders more understandable. I asked again, 'You are so good at music. Why did you accept this job? Why didn't you go on studying music?'

He sighed again. 'You're still too young to know,' he said. 'In our country, what you like, what you want to do, and what you get to do are all different. Each of us is but a small part of a big machine in society. Only those who have power can decide what role each of us can play in the machine.

'The principal of my school couldn't read music. He became principal through his connections, and had the power to decide our fate. He sent more than ten students in our class back to the countryside after finishing school. I have a friend who was my colleague in the opera group; later both of us went to the same school. He was sent back to the opera group because he once quarrelled with the principal.

'In my last year, I worked for the principal like a servant, I was assigned to the Tangshan No. 1 Middle School. The school leadership here told me that they needed someone to work on the committee and they wanted me to do the job. How could I refuse?'

He went on, 'We all live hard lives, each one with unique difficulties. People with talent aren't worth much. When I began to learn music, I was confident that with my talent and industry, I could become an independent man. Later I realised that my talent wouldn't decide my fate; only people with power can do that.

'You said you envied me. Actually I envy you as much. I studied mostly music in the vocational college so I did not study the regular courses. Diplomas determine the amount of salary you get. My diploma is from a vocational college. Though I know more about music than most graduates, I cannot get a good position without a diploma. Now I am taking all the required courses, one by one, and in the daytime I have to do all that meaningless administrative work. I have no time for my piano and violin now, much less composing.'

After this, Tan and I often drank and talked together. I also told him about myself and my worries.

'With such experiences in your life,' he said, 'I know you will do great things. One thing you must keep in mind is that in this society of ours, power decides everything. You must never offend those in power.'

In 1987 when I went home from the university for winter vacation, he invited me to a discussion with some students at the school. It was not long after the student demonstrations of that year had been crushed, and I had been an active member. I wondered how he dared to invite me. I talked to the students for two or three hours telling them why college students wanted to demonstrate. I explained to them the meaning of our slogans.

Afterwards I went to his little room and we had a drink together. I asked him why he had become so bold. He said, 'When it comes to understanding society, I am more experienced than you. Of course, I support you. But your slogans are a little one-sided. Common people cannot understand what freedom and democracy really mean. You must have more specific issues for them – inflation, corruption and the privileges of the leaders. Only when you talk about things that are connected with their immediate life can they understand and support you.' I was inspired by his words and realised that Tan's heart had not died. He still wanted society to change, he still cherished hopes for the future but his methods were different from ours. He had experienced a lot more setbacks than we had. Like so many in his generation, he was more conservative in action, would not act on impulse. But we shared the desire to bring about drastic change. Our friendship lasted.

One cold winter night, our teacher Lao Han came into the classroom for evening study and said to me quietly, 'Your mother is in the hospital. They need someone to be with her.' I rushed to the hospital. She was in a coma. The doctor told me that owing to her heart disease the family must prepare for the worst to happen at any time. He looked me up and down and asked me where my father was. 'I can't imagine a patient dying when her husband is not with her.'

I ran into my mother's room. Her face was deathly pale, and one of her arms was connected to an intravenous drip. I called several times, 'Mama, Mama,' but there was no response. I went over to her and put my finger under her nose like people did in the movies. She was still breathing, but my fear remained.

It was the first time I had thought about my mother's death. I stayed with her that night, but most of the time she was unconscious. When she came round briefly she told me to go home as she was worried about my studies. She didn't even finish her sentence before she lost consciousness again. Next time she surfaced, she apologised for not giving us children enough help. Again she was unconscious.

For the first time in my life I looked at her closely. Her face was swollen, her hair grey, her face wrinkled. Tears swam in her eyes. She was both familiar and new to me. Age had not completely concealed her beauty.

At that moment I made up my mind I would go to college. I did not want my mother to worry about me any more. I knew she would not live long – maybe a few more hours. I tried to imagine what my life would be like after my mother's death, but my mind was a blank. Finally I fell asleep.

For two weeks, my mother stayed in hospital. I did my lessons in the daytime and at night went to stay with her. The doctors told us that she had no hope of getting better unless she had a new kind of operation, which had to be done in Beijing. My father took her to have the operation.

With their departure, I started a new life. I drew a detailed plan for myself. There were three months left before the exam. I moved back home. Every morning I got up at four forty-five. From five until six I studied for an hour. From six until six thirty, I ran to school as exercise and reviewed what I had studied in the previous hour. I stayed at school all day. At nine thirty I ran home, reviewing the day's studies. At home I ate something and worked until midnight.

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My father wrote that the doctors in Beijing had agreed to operate on my mother, but they had to wait until she became a little stronger. We still had to prepare for the worst; there was a 60 per cent chance that she would die on the operating table but if she did not have the operation she might live for only another six months.

News about my mother came now and then. I felt sad and upset but I tried to study. Gradually my desire to meet the challenge grew. I remembered as a child before a fight that I always had a numb but excited feeling. I would breathe in and out, silently gulping air through my mouth. Then I would feel warm all over and knew I would win. I was tense and exhausted every night. When at last the calendar showed, 'Tomorrow is the first day of the exam. Wish you success,' I knew I would pass.

Everything closed the day before. The classrooms were sealed. Students went to the sports field and tried to crack jokes but we were only pretending. Yet I felt relaxed. I got a letter from Father telling me matter-of-factly, 'A week ago, the operation took place. I did not tell you because I did not want to disturb your studies. The operation lasted over eight hours. Everyone was nervous but it was a success.'

The first exam was Chinese, which lasted three hours. You could hear nothing but pens scribbling on paper. Afterwards, everyone agreed that the paper had been very difficult and we worried about what awaited us next. My friend Candle had fainted because he was so nervous.

When I finished the last paper, I was quite sure my dream of college would come true, but there came two weeks of anxious waiting. Soon the results were announced for each school. I was fifth in my school and knew I would get into a key university.

We decided to celebrate our graduation with a dumpling party and invited all the teachers. The classroom where we had studied for three years was turned into a dining room. We made dumplings while we talked. Some took out little notebooks and asked their classmates to write a few words for them. Before long the dumplings were made, and we said the teachers should eat first. This was the first time students and teachers gathered together casually, but it would also be the last. We felt sad.

Suddenly Datong shouted, 'Let's drink.' A bottle of gin appeared. Datong and his friends got out glasses, bottles and bottles of gin, wine and beer. Majiang took out a packet of cigarettes and after a minute a number of students also took out cigarettes. Drinking and smoking were strictly prohibited at school. Timid students stole looks at the teachers to see their reactions.

Lao Han went over to Majiang and took a cigarette. 'Let me have a smoke first,' he said, 'and then I will have a drink.' Everyone laughed and relaxed. Lao Han went on to say, 'I know you have longed for freedom while you were under my control. From now on you will no longer be children but adults. It is the end of my rule over you. Your future is in your hands.'

Everyone clapped. Boys drank big gulps of liquor and smoked one cigarette after another.

I left the room quietly and walked slowly around the campus. I felt sad to leave all this, especially the gingko trees we had planted when we first came to the school. Happy memories flooded back to me.

I was in this nostalgic mood for a few days. I went around Tangshan to places I had frequented. I felt sad when I saw new buildings where my kindergarten had been. The castle was gone, too. The one-storey houses where Da Pa and Da Ma and other miners lived had been pulled down and new buildings erected.

The only thing that remained was the pit by the orchard where the victims of the earthquake were buried.

The day I left I looked at my parents and grandmother. A lump came into my throat. I didn't let them see me off at the railway station. I wouldn't have been able to leave if they had.

Usually on a train I would talk to the people around me, but this time I sat quietly and talked to no one. I watched the scenery pass the window, thinking of the road I had taken in previous years.

When the train got to Taian, I got off and started climbing Mount Tai, one of the most famous mountains in China. At the top of the mountain I seemed to have a bird's-eye view of the universe. I felt I had now reached one peak in my life and was ready to climb to another.

A two-hour bus ride brought me to my family village – Licun in Shandong province. I visited the family home and read some of the

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family history my relatives showed me. I wanted to know what kind of people my clan had produced. The relatives encouraged me to do well and bring honour to them.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

College

'I take the oath. I volunteer to join the Communist Party of China. I will abide by Party discipline, keep Party secrets, and obey the Party all my life. I volunteer to devote my life to the Party and its cause of communism and fight for it till my very end.'

I had been at Nanjing University (Nanking) only a few months and now I was a Party member. I stole a glance around me at the others in the big classroom. Everyone was staring at the red flag, some with tears in their eyes. The atmosphere was one of mystery and solemnity.

'How is this different from religion?' I asked myself. 'Then who is this god? Is it the red flag?' I was frightened by my own thoughts. I had already started to discard the dogmas of Marxism and scorned the religious-seeming worship of the Party. I was none the less enthusiastically engrossed in reforms within the system. This was in 1985. I still believed that in China it was essential to try to reform the Communist Party from within which was why I decided to join it.

My first objective was to mobilise the students. After working for a short time in the college students' union, I discovered that its leaders had little power, but were corrupted by what little power was theirs. Though the students' union had its own rules, regulations and elections, it was merely a tool of the Party. I decided to reform this structure.

I started by making friends. Gradually we formed a small circle of reformers; one was two years my senior and came from my home town. He did well and would probably win the election for the coming student congress. Another was from the Department of Computer Sciences so we called him Computer. We set up a committee to supervise the work of the executive committee of the students' union. The two committees were to be parallel to each other. The supervisory committee should be elected directly by the students to be responsible for their interests. In this way the executive committee could not just act according to orders from the Party and League committees. Everything had to pass the supervision of the student-elected supervisory committee.

Everyone in our circle took part in the election. The results greatly surprised us. The election for the supervisory committee went smoothly, well-known and competent people were elected. But when it came to the executive committee, of those talented and influential people we expected to be elected, all failed. The thirteen elected were people of bad moral character. The three who were to be chairman and vice-chairmen were even worse. The chairman was Xiao Lou, an ugly, timid, mean person who did not know how to speak. We did not understand how this had happened, but we accepted it as the result of the election.

I found the seven other members of the standing committee had the same goal: to please the deputy secretary of the League committee, and through him the secretary of the Party committee. Everyone wanted to be a little Napoleon and place his own people in the students' union so leaders and their subordinates clung to each other on a mutually beneficial basis.

I was particularly disappointed in friends like Computer and my fellow townsman; when they were supposed to apply our common ideals, they forgot about them and worked only for their practical goals. I watched the flattering and servile behaviour of the League secretary when he reported to the Party secretary. I also witnessed the same behaviour in the standing committee of the students' union when the League secretary came to our discussions.

My only hope was that self-government and self-management could be practised in the supervisory committee to guarantee the basic rights of the students. Within the supervisory committee I set up committees to help manage the library, comment on teaching and inspect food provisions, dormitory management and discipline. I talked to the librarian, the director of food management, the supervisors of the dormitories, and others, hoping they would allow more opportunity for students to voice their opinions and take part in the management of the college. At first everyone promised to improve their work. Our reforms became known in newspapers throughout

the country and Fu, the League secretary, was in the limelight for some time. But these people never considered allowing students to interfere in their work.

In the meantime, I recruited a group of deeply committed, talented students and started to investigate the election. I soon found out that Xiao Lou, the present chairman of the students' union, had brought in dozens of people to control the vote. He had corrupted all of them, had either invited them to dinner or given them gifts. But where did his money come from?

I sent people to investigate his accounts. We found that the students' union had arranged a class to help people who were going to take the entrance exam in political study, and they charged a high tuition fee. The amount must have been at least a thousand *yuan*, but I only found a hundred *yuan* recorded in the accounts. When I asked a student who worked for Xiao Lou about the discrepancy, he tried to cover it up at first, but eventually owned up that the income from this class was a few thousand *yuan* and that he had definitely given it to Xiao Lou.

Further investigation showed more problems in Xiao's accounts. The purchase of some batteries was recorded as 100 *yuan*, but they cost at most 10 *yuan*. We found the receipt had been tampered with.

Then I found out that Xiao had all his printing done in one printing house, whose prices were extremely high. One day I went to the home of its director, a middle-aged woman. When she learned I was a leader in the student's union, she was very hospitable. She told me she and Xiao were on excellent terms; he had dinner at her house at least twice a week, she said, and brought a lot of friends with him. She invited me to come too. 'You students do not have your homes here. Please come whenever you like.'

This was why Xiao gave all his business to her and paid high prices for in return he and his friends got free meals, which helped him elect the leaders of the students' union. They could then tamper with receipts and make all sorts of secret transactions. I had never imagined that a small organisation like the students' union could be so corrupt.

I had been disgusted with the bribery during the election campaign. I gave all the evidence to Fu, the deputy secretary of the League committee. After waiting for some time, I went to him again and asked how he would handle it. He would not give a clear-cut answer. Obviously he was not going to do anything.

He explained. 'We are among the most advanced in terms of student work: the Nanjing University model is known far and wide. These problems you discovered do not fit the image of an advanced unit. As to Xiao, he was criticised and returned the money. All the items have been entered into the accounts.'

I asked him to show me the accounts, which he did. I picked up a receipt and saw it was a donation by someone for 1,000 *yuan*. I asked how one could tell that this was restitution for wrongdoing that was now cleared. He said they would not like to leave traces in the accounts. Xiao had cried and realised he had done wrong so we should stop at this. I was furious. If we forgave Xiao in this instance, what and who else could we not forgive?

It was such a serious case – not just a mistake or a violation of discipline but a violation of law. It was robbery of public funds. He said, 'Xiao is basically a good person, and we haven't got enough evidence to accuse him of anything. Now that he has admitted his mistake that he had forgotten to enter the income of the political study class into the accounts, and has since put everything right, we should forgive him.'

I went to another school leader in the propaganda department. I told him everything. To my surprise he said that it was not good to bypass the immediate leadership and complain to a higher level. Then he told me that Deputy Secretary Fu was a good and capable leader. The Party committee was thinking of transferring him to work in the office of the Party committee.

Now I understood why Fu took such a stance when I talked to him about Xiao's case. The reforms of the student work of our university had become well known all over the country and Fu had been praised. He would soon be promoted. If anything bad was exposed about the well-known student leaders, the reform would be a failure and he would be finished.

'I'm going to tell the newspapers about this case,' I said.

'If you go to the newspapers,' he said threateningly, 'the university will be embarrassed. It will be difficult for the university to carry on its work. Do you have any evidence?'

'I do. I gave it to Secretary Fu.'

'If the evidence is in Fu's hands, how can you give it to the newspapers? Besides, you could not see any problem in the accounts, could you?'

Now I realised why Fu had taken away all my evidence. Clearly he would not return it to me.

I had been completely deceived. I felt awkward about the friends who had worked with me: I did not want to tell them what I had experienced – they had not participated in the investigation and did not know about the corruption. They were still full of ideals and hope.

Not long after I left the students' union, Fu was promoted to work in the office of the Party committee. The chairman of our students' union became the vice-chairman of the National Students' Union. Everyone got something out of the reform movement and went on climbing up the social ladder. When the deputy secretary of the League committee found that his wrongdoing had been recognised, he gave a colour television to his superior and got himself out of trouble. I was foolish; I went to the deputy secretary with evidence I had collected from hard work. But Xiao got to him first with an expensive gift. Of course there was no comparison.

In the summer of 1986, I was alone on campus. The other students had gone home for the summer vacation. I was sitting in my room naked except for my underwear; sweat poured off me. I had about a hundred books on my bed and desk which I had borrowed from the library by using the library cards of more than ten of my fellow students.

I read one after another. Sometimes I took notes; sometimes I tore my writing to pieces. I thought of the future of China. I tried to verify Marxism. I read Western theory. I read philosophy and thought a great deal about the meaning of life. Scenes from my life kept coming back to me in which people argued and fought with each other. Finally I could stand this no longer. I decided to travel, to see more of the world, to see more people and make more friends.

To travel I had to cheat. I had practically no money. Over time, I learned a series of ways to travel free. The simplest was to hide in the WC on trains. When I heard the conductor coming, I would open the lock to show from outside that there was no one in it. After he had finished checking all the passengers, it was safe to come out. If it seemed that I might be caught, I would blend into the crowd. If I was brought face to face with the conductor, I invented a story and gained his sympathy. If the worst came to the worst, I would let him put me off the train.

Finding a place to stay for the night was not much of a problem. I could always sleep in the railway station, bus terminal or any other place where wanderers stayed. I had no money, so I wasn't afraid of being robbed. Getting food was more difficult. I tried to make friends on the way and ask them for food. If I was lucky, I did small jobs in return for food for the day. Sometimes I worked just for a meal. It was easier in the villages: I could either beg or offer to help with farm work and earn a meal. When I really had no other way out, I sold my clothes. In this way I journeyed around China.

As I visited various colleges and universities, I found a sense of loss permeated college students. Some indulged in dancing and courting girls; some played mahjong all day; some spent their time on preparing for the test to study abroad; some were engrossed in reading books from the West; some went in for reform; some racked their brains to make money; some fantasised about creating a new philosophy or art; and some liked new poetry and rock 'n' roll music. But underneath all the differences I sensed a central characteristic of my generation: the concept of the individual standing up against an autocratic system that sought to eliminate individuality. Many did not know how to develop as individuals but had a strong desire to rebel against convention and society; they did not want to be slaves like their fathers.

My journey was varied and exciting, but I was still puzzled by the question of the real significance of Marxism and the Communist movement. The reality was clearly a disaster but I found it hard totally to refute Marxist theory.

One day, on my way back to Nanjing on the train, something happened that finally suggested an answer. As I walked into a carriage, I found an old man fiddling with a transistor radio. The radio and the old man did not seem to match. He was in rags, his face was dirty and his hair was messy, but the radio was brand new. It was switched on, but only crackled.

I wanted to help him, so I said to him, 'Grandpa, don't turn it on now. It'll be all right when you listen to it at home. On the train, the walls keep the sound from coming out normally. You won't get anything.' But the old man ignored me. He went on playing with the radio and talking to himself. I tried again, but it was as if I were talking to a deaf person.

Finally he said, 'Young man, I learned from this box that nowadays

the peasants are getting better off. I earned enough on this trip to buy a radio. So it means that the days of the peasants are getting better. I have been dreaming of buying a radio all my life. There is only one loudspeaker in my brigade, and it broadcasts only once a day. But with more and more people owning radios, there aren't enough signals to be divided up among us, because there are just a few of them. So you see, now I can't get anything out of my radio.'

I told him, 'That's not so. The signals are everywhere in the sky. They have nothing to do with how many people are listening to the radio. In the train the walls are made of iron; they keep the sound from coming in.'

He didn't believe me. 'You're too young. If you were as old as I am, you would know better. In front of my house runs a canal. I would like to make an opening so that water would flow into my private plot of land. Now since the reform started, land has been allotted to more people and they made use of the water in the canal for their land. There are so many openings now that when the water gets to my land, there's hardly any left. It is the same with the radio.'

I came to realise that those old Marxist books were like the old man using his own theory to criticise others. No matter how absurd a theory, it seeks to explain and rationalise itself, and when a theory has a strong logical system, it has an exclusivity that can convincingly dismiss other theories.

Marxism, I saw, had played a big joke on us. It refuted all other theories just to prove itself correct.

Looking at history, I wondered why mankind hadn't found any other forms of civilisation. Where would we go from here? I was doubtful about the Marxist theory that mankind developed in ladder-like progression. Why should we be made to believe Marxist theory as others believe religious doctrine? People have different views. Why should someone declare that his views were the only correct ones? Why should those with different beliefs be eliminated? Why shouldn't people have the freedom to believe what they like?

Suddenly I felt I was a tiny element of the universe; I could wander freely in it. There are so many possibilities – and so much that we do not understand. The iron mountain of Marxism was no longer a mountain in my way. It, too, was no more than a grain of sand in the universe.

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After I returned to school, I decided to transfer to the economics department. At that time it was almost impossible to transfer from one department to another. I had to see Yu Hanying, the vice-chairman of the economics department. I was surprised when I met her. She had a pleasant face, with bobbed hair and glasses. There was no trace of the bureaucrat about her. She had the look of an intellectual.

When I came to her office, she offered me a cup of tea. I told her I wanted to transfer to her department. She told me it would be very difficult unless I had a special talent for economics. She asked why I wanted to change to economics and I gave her my views on social problems. Before I left I handed her a paper.

When I returned the next day, she said, 'Though the paper was still tentative, your power of observation and thinking are rare. It shows your talent in economics. You can come to my department.'

It hadn't been easy for me to arrive at my decision. I loved physics; my parents strongly opposed my transfer and my father came to Nanjing to talk to me. We seldom wrote to each other yet deep down we had much in common. My father believed that science and education could save the country. He did not trust politicians. He asked, 'Are you going in for politics?'

'I really don't know,' I answered. 'But I know if I am needed in politics, I will do it.'

He was silent for a long time. Then he asked, 'Do you know what it means to go into politics in China?'

'No, I don't.'

'It means that you should tie your head to your belt. That's a Chinese saying meaning you should be prepared to run great risks and die.'

I told him what I knew of Wei Jingsheng, and other martyrs of the Democracy Wall in Beijing, and of many who had died in massacres. We also discussed his experiences. I could be a first-rate scientist, he said, and that was the correct way to serve the country and mankind.

'Well, I am certain that with your intelligence and talent you could have become a great master in science,' I replied, 'but look at your life in China. It was absurd. A first-rate scientist was turned into a first-rate bricklayer, a first-rate *kang* builder, a first-rate miner, a first-rate husband and father. Isn't it absurd? In this system in China, how is it possible to make way for science to develop?'

He did not agree. 'A person's goal does not express itself in the

result of his action; its significance lies in the great efforts he makes to achieve the goal.' He admitted that he had lost much time, and that he had gained no prominence in any one field. He did not feel unhappy to be living in this way because he had great curiosity every time he entered a new realm and he felt he had solved some problems with his intelligence and ability. Viewed with a shortsighted expediency in today's China, these problems might not be important, significant or worthwhile but every small discovery or invention was a creation and a contribution to mankind. It was the accumulation of the discoveries and contributions of everyone that enabled society to advance. He only hoped that his belief and ideas could be accepted by more and more people. When everyone accepted his ideas, the world would be peaceful, kind, active, progressive, and prosperous. That was his ideal.

I acknowledged that I was attracted by his ideal. But I told him that this would not be my way of life. I wanted to study the history of the past forty years, and I wanted to analyse the direction in which China was heading. These might not be solid discoveries or inventions, as he understood them. If everybody could be engaged in this pursuit, society could become more civilised. The research would sum up mankind's bitter experience of fighting and killing and lay bare its cruelty and barbarity, so that people would shun it and build a world of love and civilisation.

I tried to prove that my way of life was not contradictory to his. He tried to prove that the continuing discovery of the universe was the vital thing.

The debate lasted a long time. In the end, although neither of us could convince the other, we understood each other. He said I was like my grandfather. He told me that after my grandfather was labelled a rightist, he became a janitor and his talents were buried. He himself was in the Soviet Union then. My grandfather and he wrote long letters to each other in which they carried out lengthy discussions on the important issues of the time; they could not agree but they respected each other's views. My father's attitude towards me was the same as that of my grandfather towards him. Each of us was insistent on his own ideas, but something was common to us both.

Before my father left, he told me that my grandmother had once said to him that when she heard my grandfather had died in prison, she seemed to hear a bang as if a steel man fell down never to rise again. After 1957 there were many opportunities in which, if he had written a short self-criticism, he could have resumed his work and professorship. But he would not write it. When he was imprisoned in 1967 had he admitted he was wrong he would not have been beaten so severely nor tortured so cruelly. According to my grandmother, he persisted in taking a cold bath every day – he wanted to compete with Mao Zedong to see who could live longer.

My father said to me as he got on the train, 'No matter how different our beliefs are, I hope members of our family will become steel men.'

As the train was pulling away, I had an image of my grandfather, with dirty face and tangled hair, sitting in a dark prison after a day's torture, thinking. He believed that one day the demand for freedom would be the unanimous voice of mankind.

I returned with renewed zeal to political life. I was now the vice-chairman of the School Oratory Association and the Association for Social Investigation. During the student movement in 1987, we discussed setting up a more organised student body, because the main problem of the 1987 student movement was the lack of strong organisation, a clear programme, and sufficient mobilisation of the masses. The movement rose up fast – and faded fast, too. Afterwards, we decided to form an organisation called the Thinkers' Club and open a coffee-house called Heart Bridge.

Every weekend we met there and talked about a wide range of topics – science, art, marriage, family, reform, economics, politics, history – but mainly we discussed China's social problems.

It was at the coffee-house that I met Zhao Ming. It was 26 April 1988. At about ten that evening, I felt agitated and went out for a walk. I went into the Heart Bridge Coffee-house. Business was slack and only two or three tables were occupied. I went to our usual table and chatted with the manager. I was still restless. I walked over to the table where a group of girls were sitting. I said poker-faced, 'I hear that a man is wanted at this table. How about me?' The girls giggled. I sat down without invitation.

One of them particularly caught my attention. She was wearing a red dress. Her hair shone, and a few strands danced naughtily on her forehead. She had beautiful eyes framed by thick eyebrows. Her face was the shape Chinese call 'melon-seed'. Her nose and her mouth were small, her skin fair. She gave the impression that she smiled all the time. I found her very attractive. We danced, talked, and

sang through the night. She had a lovely voice and smile. No matter if she was talking, listening, or singing, she seemed to be smiling.

Next day I went to class, but nothing entered my mind but her image. She came into my dreams – the first time a *real* girl had been in my dreams. I went to see her that night and made a date with her. She said she would invite me to dance at a friend's birthday party. I went to the rendezvous, and the doorman asked if I was looking for a girl. She had left a message telling me to go to a dancing party at a different place. I wasn't sure if he was talking about the same girl I came to see. So I asked him to make sure. 'Of course I am talking about Zhao Ming,' he said. 'I wouldn't pass on a message for any other girl.'

I danced with her the whole night and would not let her dance with anyone else, though I found I had many competitors. The only secure defence against the others was to take her out for a walk. We talked about everything – things I had never told anyone else. I didn't know why I trusted her so much. All the while she listened with the same smile on her face. Sometimes she would ask a question or two – sometimes ridiculous ones, which only added to her naïve charm.

I found I wanted to see her every day. I told her I loved her. She was shy in responding. 'Actually I fell in love with you the first time I saw you and heard you talk.'

'What was the first sentence I said?'

'The first sentence showed you to be a direct person,' she said. 'You said, "I hear that a man is wanted at this table." You were so serious when you said that, you were really unembarrassed. I loved you right there and then.' She majored in British and American literature, and was greatly influenced by romantic works.

We often went to the suburbs. In the evening I liked to lie with my head in her lap on the lawn and tell her stories. She especially liked to hear stories about my childhood and my reading of poetry. Whenever she heard a sad story or poem, she cried. She was the first living girl I fell in love with, rather than an imaginary ideal.

As well as the coffee-house, I set up a month long series of talks among and by the undergraduates. We had nine talks in all, including the political, economic and philosophical issues that college students were concerned about. The speakers were all my friends. One was the general manager of the coffee-house, a very down-to-earth, principled man. Another was a girl who loved to travel. She had been to many places, and she talked about how to travel economically, how to investigate social issues in different places and among different kinds of people, how to find yourself. Still another was someone who had experience in love affairs and had plenty to say about love, marriage and the lives of women.

The forum attracted increasingly large numbers, and I started to include more serious issues in the debates. The discussion became more political in nature, gradually turning into criticisms of the social system. At the last talk, I invited about forty of my friends to take part in a round-table discussion. The room held 300 people, but more came and crowded into the aisles. The topics ranged from poetry to the origin of civilisation in China to modern culture to current social problems, then switched to the history of development of Western civilisation to the Renaissance to modern science to the two world wars, etc. People were filled with enthusiasm. In between the talks and discussions I arranged singing and dancing performances. The event ended with all 500 people singing the title song from *Red Sorghum*, the movie that had just won the best-film award in Germany.

In the summer of 1988 I wanted to extend the coffee-house activities outdoors. I put up a notice for a watermelon party on the lawn. The school administration became nervous; they were afraid this could turn into a student movement, as Nanjing University had always been one of the originators of student unrest. Leaders at all levels talked to me and, after failing to stop the party, they said the students would get drunk and throw watermelon skins everywhere, thus soiling the environment. They wanted to make this the excuse to expel me from the Party.

Then they resorted to my absence at classes. They threatened me by saying that a student missing as many as twenty classes would be expelled from the university. I had to go to classes and cut down on social activities. The Government closed down our coffee-house. The excuse was that we didn't pay taxes. The law was in their hands; they could use it in any way they liked. It was now difficult to organise any activities, as we had nowhere that would hold a large number of people.

The economic situation was in a mess. After discussion, we came to the conclusion that the economic order of China was entirely built on the planning of the central government. In our discussions, the concept of the market had two implications. One was the existence of independent economic bodies in the market. All the actions of these bodies were taken to acquire the greatest economic interests for themselves. The other was the function of adjustment of prices within the market. If the mechanisms in the market were working smoothly and correctly, the adjustment could organise the individual bodies into one system by unifying the actions of the floating, separate units and raising them on to a macro level. This was done as if by an invisible hand. But for the invisible hand to fulfil its function, every economic body had to have its right to independent action, its own means of production, its right to decide on the price of a commodity and the flexibility to change its mode of production or product. But in China these prerequisites were lacking.

People took the recent incomplete market reforms as the opportunity to seek only their own economic interests. After the open-door policy was introduced, people who had been poor for decades and had buried their desires, suddenly saw that the world outside was better. They seized on the chance like tigers who had long been shut up in cages and were suddenly released into deep forest which their hunger drove them to plunder cruelly. In this war of plunder, the stronger tigers, tigers with power, the former leading class, took much more than common people. City people gained more than country people. Every tiger clawed away at the forest without any thought of protecting it.

What did they hope to gain from the plunder? We found it was the wealth that the Chinese people had accumulated while tightening their belts in the past few decades. The wealth was gathered under the call of Mao Zedong. 'Be prepared against war; be prepared against natural disasters.' But Deng Xiaoping thought war unlikely and loosened the belt. It was natural that people wanted to eat their fill; they had been starving for decades. The state sold great amounts of materials to foreign countries. With the foreign currency it bought batch after batch of colour televisions, refrigerators, cassette recorders, VCRs, cars, and other luxurious electronic appliances. Salaries and wages were raised. Work units gave bonuses. Small private businesses were encouraged. Now they had money, people rushed out to buy all kinds of consumer goods.

The wealth that had been accumulated over the decades was divided up by the hungry tigers overnight. Our economic development lost its reserves. Enterprises cancelled their long-term plans, concentrating instead on fulfilling the immediate interests of their leaders and staff. They now thought little about how to help the enterprises – which, after all, were state-owned; therefore no one was responsible for their ultimate fate. The staff would not mind selling all the manufacturing machinery in these enterprises, as long as they could have their bonuses. A plundering of the resources was now taking place. Everyone sold and bought, but no one created anything. Peasants, workers, science and technical workers, grassroots Party cadres, college teachers, students, unemployed people, vagabonds – everyone took part.

For many peasants it was the first time they had the chance to come to the city. There they discovered the great difference between the city and the country, and they felt that the good life of city people was based on exploitation of the peasants. But both the city and country people were angered by the luxurious life of the high-ranking leaders, many of whom had large savings in foreign banks. Where did they get all this money except through embezzlement by abusing their power? Many of the children of such leaders were involved in 'official speculation'. For the Kanghua Company, the biggest in China engaged in 'official speculation', the general manager was Deng Xiaoping's son Deng Pufang. Almost all the top leaders' children – Wang Zhen's son Wang Jun, the four sons of Zhao Ziyang, Wan Li's son, and many others – took a very active part in this business.

The people felt they were being cheated by the bureaucrats of the Communist Party. They were told to work hard and practise frugality, and the wealth they created was divided up by the leaders. Inflation rocketed unavoidably. The complaints and desire for consumer goods of the common people increased daily. Society was permeated by dissatisfaction and repressed anger, an explosive mixture awaiting ignition.

CHAPTER NINE

Nanjing

I had been out to visit friends on Saturday night, 15 April, and didn't return until late. As usual there were several messages on my bed, and I glanced at them. One of them brought me up short. It read, 'Hu Yaobang has died.' I was stunned. He was hardly seventy – the youngest among his generation of leaders. He had been a young man when he was on the Long March with Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping.

It wasn't just that a relatively young leader had died, but that it had been Hu. He had actively advocated reform – and especially political reform. In 1987 he defended the students' demand for reform and had been expelled from his post as General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party. Even now, two years later, many people hoped he would return to his post and continue his campaigning. His death crushed such hopes.

The next morning, Little Brother, whom I met in the Thinkers' Club, came to see me. We both felt we should do something for Hu's death. We decided to gather people to write elegiac couplets and big-character posters. When we went to put them up on campus, there were already many there, and more and more appeared, praising Hu for the good he had done in his life – proper memorial sentiments.

By the next day, 17 April, the slogans and posters were changing from memorials to Hu into criticism of the current state of affairs: the crises in education and the economy, the lack of morality, the rampant corruption of officials, resistance of the leaders to political reforms, Deng Xiaoping's autocracy, and the suppression of freedom in the media. Daily the posters grew more numerous and the criticisms more pointed.

A long poem that narrated Hu's accomplishments attracted particular attention. It criticised the weakness of Chinese students; Hu lost his position because he had protected the students and their movement. Why hadn't we had the courage to support him? Now he was dead. Moved, I looked for the author's signature: none other than my friend Chen Xuedong. All the other poster-makers used pseudonyms; this was the only one to carry the author's real name, which showed tremendous courage for punishment would be swift and severe.

Clearly something great was going to happen. We must be prepared to take the next step. The whole country now looked to Beijing. I asked my most reliable friends to establish instant communication with the students there via fax, telephone and computer. Other friends listened to the BBC and Voice of America (VOA) every day; they summarised news reports on posters and put them up.

Then I visited many student friends to discuss the next step, acting as liaison. I suggested we all make posters and put them up across the campus at the same time next day.

When I went to see Chen Xuedong, he had his pen in hand, ready to write. When I praised his poem, he said modestly, 'There should always be someone who takes the first step. I thought perhaps I ought to do it. I know those who are really courageous and intelligent had been preparing for action long ago.' He smiled at me – he knew I was making plans for the May Fourth commemoration of the events of 1919 (when students once before marched on Tiananmen Square). 'If we're going to have demonstrations and rallies,' he continued, 'I'm ready to take the lead again.'

'You won't be alone,' I told him.

The next day the posters were even better. More and more people came out to read them. Some gave reports about the demonstrations in Beijing and news briefs from the BBC and VOA. Others listed the mistakes the Communist Party had committed in the past forty years and analysed the causes.

One group of posters attacked the Four Basic Principles: first, adherence to Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought, they said, meant that only one kind of thinking was correct, which went directly against freedom of thought; second, adherence to the leadership of the Communist Party was the basis for autocracy; third, adherence to

the dictatorship of the proletariat gave the Party the right to suppress the people with violence at any time; and fourth, adherence to socialism eliminated the possibility of market reform. These posters hit the core of the problem of Communist rule: since the Four Basic Principles were written into the Constitution, no mere reform could ever be successful since it could never eliminate the causes of the crisis.

I thought about our Constitution. Its Article 35 was a Bill of Rights, which stated that every citizen had the free right to speak, to publish, to assemble, to organise, to demonstrate, and to petition. Appealing to Article 35 could serve to legitimise the student movement.

One of my friends in the law department had been a leader in the 1987 student movement. He wrote well, and was happy to produce an article on the rights of Article 35 and the student movement.

I sought out the author of the attack on the Four Principles. He turned out to be someone I knew, a member of the first generation to go through college starting in 1978 after the Cultural Revolution. Like many idealists, when he graduated he had been repelled by the corruption with which he would have had to come to terms if he were to fulfil the role for which he had trained; disillusioned, he had returned to the university for graduate study. These idealists wanted only to hide. They often went to a wood behind the university to drink and play guitar and talk into the middle of the night. I joined them frequently.

Now we met again. Others came. Filled with cheerful optimism, we made plans to work together to organise and lead the burgeoning movement.

Another group of graduate students, however, had already started their own preparations for the day of Hu Yaobang's funeral, and they said they hoped no one would interfere with their leadership. I was shocked that the question of interference should be raised already, when the student movement had hardly started.

Later I learned they had already arranged with the school officials to set up a mourning hall and hold a memorial ceremony for Hu on 20 April. They didn't want to offend the officials; they were ready to compromise from the very start.

I knew the Party committee of Nanjing University very well. They considered student activists a headache and wanted to crush any student movement. Now they had agreed to set up a mourning hall in order to limit student activities to mourning Hu.

The next day a box was put out on a table for donations to commemorate Hu. After some discussion my friends and I decided to join the effort which we thought we could build on. I helped out at the table, accepting donations, answering questions and telling people of the memorial ceremony the next afternoon. We hoped everyone would attend it; once the crowd had assembled, it should be possible to turn the gathering into a demonstration.

Donations came in rapidly. Many workers and people other than students came, too. Even old professors donated generous sums. If the professors, usually conservative and timid, and the workers supported us, then anything could happen.

In the evening an elderly man appeared with his granddaughter. He wore his old army uniform; one side of his jacket was covered with all the medals he won and the other with Chairman Mao badges. People crowded round and took pictures of him. While he read the posters tears streamed down his face. When asked why he was crying, he said, 'I went to the martyrs' cemetery at Yuhuatai today, to see my comrades-in-arms. Five of us from my village came to join the army, and the other four are buried there. I thought I'd give them some comfort, tell them everything's fine down here, but . . .

'We answered Chairman Mao's call. We left our village, left our families, to join the revolution. And now it's ended up like this. We were deceived. Deceived.

'I get a pension. It'll keep me alive. But it can't keep up with prices. Not close. When I look at my neighbours and the life they live, I feel so sad. When I was young, only honest people could be leaders. But now the leaders are people with evil hearts. Oh, where is Chairman Mao now when we need him?' He cried again.

I felt sad for the old soldier, for the millions of soldiers who sacrificed their lives to win a republic – a republic that fell into the hands of a few dictators. But maybe the old soldier is the lucky one. He still has the Mao of his memory, the honest leader. If he understood that Mao was also the cause of all this, would he be able to go on living?

On 20 April, at 5 p.m., thousands of people gathered in the south compound of Nanjing University for an unofficial memorial for Hu Yaobang. There were many speeches extolling him for his contribution to reform. The ceremony was so decorous and rigid it could have been an official one. But just as people were about to leave, my friend Chen Xuedong jumped on to the platform and asked to say a few words. He was very excited. 'Our country has come to the point that people cannot live a decent life,' he said. 'We have no freedom to speak of, no democracy. People have believed in the Party and the Government in the reform movement. But what have the reforms given us? Inflation, corruption, injustice, a crisis in education. Economic reforms cannot progress without political reforms.

'Now, the people have no say in anything. Only the leaders have a say. Only the Party leads. But China does not just belong to one party, one person, or sons of someone. China belongs to everybody!

'Hu Yaobang was expelled from his post because he sympathised with the student movement. He died in anger. We did not give him enough support when he was alive; shouldn't we do something for him now he is dead? I stepped forward because I think we owe it to Hu Yaobang, who worked truly for the people, and who is still unjustly accused of some crimes. His name should be cleared, and we should demonstrate in support of what he stood for and the people. Those who have conscience and courage, please stand up and follow me.'

The applause was tumultuous. People streamed after Chen out of the room, ready to march. Chen had never been so eloquent.

The demonstration formed a big army marching towards Nanjing Institute of Technology, shouting all kinds of slogans: 'Stop inflation!' 'Rehabilitate Hu!' All thirty or so colleges and universities were soon mobilised and gradually the army grew to over five thousand. As the crowd surged along, I heard people saying they had not felt so excited for years.

Some of the marchers had cameras; they were either officials or plain-clothes police. Chen had only a small megaphone, so his voice didn't carry and he couldn't keep the slogans in chorus. When I caught up with him, his face was pale. He could hardly control the crowd.

People wanted to go to the provincial government building. I was against it because these people, who had never been allowed to express their feelings, did not know how to handle the freedom they had now. They were angry and frustrated, and it might become even harder to control the situation. News had just arrived from Beijing that a group of people had attacked the Xinhuamen (New China Gate), the entrance to the Zhongnanhai compound where the government leaders lived. I felt that we should not do anything provocative until it was clear what really happened in Beijing.

But I also thought we should break with tradition – rallies always ended in front of the government building with a request for dialogue with the officials. We managed to pull the demonstrators away from there to Gulou (Drum Tower) Square. Many broke little bottles to protest against the leadership of Deng Xiaoping – the characters for 'little bottle' were also pronounced '*xiao ping*'.

The demonstrators dispersed very late that night, still exhilarated. Chen said it was the first time he had realised the strength of the people. 'I don't care if I am expelled or punished,' he said. 'I am determined to struggle to the end.'

The next morning, more news came from Beijing of the conflict in front of the Xinhuamen. The unarmed students had been beaten by police.

I went looking for Chen Xuedong and other friends, but I could find no one. Back at my own room there were several messages, all saying that the school Party committee wanted to see me immediately. That explained where my friends were – they must have been summoned too.

When I saw Chen Xuedong that evening, he told me he had been grilled by everyone – teachers in the department, the department Party secretary, the director of the school propaganda department, and then the school Party secretary. He was not allowed to eat or go out. They had threatened him with expulsion from school and told him that the police had asked the school to turn in the leaders of the demonstration.

The situation was serious. All the leaders had gone through the same ordeal. I didn't think the authorities knew I had been so involved behind the scenes this time, but they knew perfectly well that I had always been politically active, and they clearly wanted to deal with me now. I told my roommates I was sick and I was going to stay with friends.

I haven't been back to my dormitory since that day.

April 22 was the official day for Hu Yaobang's funeral ceremony. I had already contacted a number of schools, and we planned to hold a big demonstration that day. Tension hung in the air.

All the posters had been ripped and torn down.

People looked apprehensive and guarded. Announcements and notices were posted everywhere telling the students to go that afternoon to the memorial activities organised by the authorities where they were to watch a television transmission of the official funeral ceremony in Beijing and there were announcements that the spring sports meeting would be brought forward to the next two days, 23 and 24 April. It was obvious that the authorities wanted to keep the students in hand and well occupied until the unrest blew over.

At noon the university president's speech came over the loudspeakers. Chu Xinyue was well known at home and abroad as an astrological physicist; he was the youngest fellow of the Academy of Sciences and a reformer within the Party. 'I understand your concern for the country,' he said, 'but you should present your criticisms and suggestions to the Party and administration through proper channels. Demonstrations will not help; they will only add to the chaos in society. The Party and state have done their best in the reforms. But for reform we must have a stable environment.' It was the typical view of the reformers within the Party – that reforms were the responsibility of the Party and government leaders. People should be confident that everything would be done well. They should not interfere.

In the afternoon everybody in the school was called to the official mourning ceremony. With no people, obviously there could be no demonstration. I went to other schools and things were more or less the same.

The news on the morning of 23 April told of an incident in the city of Xi'an, in Shaanxi province, in which cars had been smashed and burned. There had been demonstrations in Changsha, Hunan province, and stores had been looted. The official broadcast blamed these disturbances on the student movement.

In Nanjing, plain-clothes policemen were everywhere. The school authorities had questioned all the activists, especially those graduate students who organised unofficial activities, and threatened them with certain punishment if they continued to demonstrate. The authorities tore down posters as soon as they were put up.

Yet even as the authorities were getting the upper hand, we read the first letters from intellectuals in support of the student movement. And exciting news came from Beijing every day. On 22 April, more than 100,000 students gathered in Tiananmen Square for the official funeral ceremony of Hu Yaobang in the Great Hall of the People. Three students knelt on the steps of the Great Hall for forty minutes, trying to present a petition to the top leaders inside. But none of them would come out. The 100,000 students had waited for more than ten hours. The *Science and Technology Daily* reported details of these events, and even though the paper was immediately closed down by the Beijing municipal Party committee, it was too late. News of the student movement had carried throughout the country.

I went to see Chen Xuedong. He was reading an old manuscript article by Hu Ping, 'On the Freedom of Press'. Chen was under great pressure to keep quiet since he had been the first one to step forward openly. The Party secretaries at all levels and even the president of the university had questioned him and threatened him. He knew there would be no job for him when he graduated. He faced possible expulsion and even punishment. He was very tired and pale. But he was firm in his purpose. 'I've already gone so far,' he said. 'I won't back out now. Besides, what I believe in is right, and what I'm doing now is right. I'll go on doing it no matter what happens.

'The demonstration showed the potential of our generation. We'll make historic contributions to our country. We'll have to sacrifice a lot to do it, but that's worthwhile.'

While Chen and I were talking, his father arrived. The school authorities had called him and told him to come and talk to his son. I went next door to leave them alone. Soon I heard loud quarrelling in Chen's room, and then a door slamming.

Chen said his father had severed all ties with him, and wouldn't send him any more money. He tried to look nonchalant about it, but I could see he was upset and apprehensive. I told him not to worry; as long as I had something to eat he would have food too.

A liaison person arrived from Beijing. He told us that the Independent Students' Union had been formed to lead the movement. Hundreds of people from Beijing were mobilising students all over the country. We decided to organise another demonstration that evening. It didn't matter how big it was, the important thing was to break the silence, to show people that there were students who persisted in the struggle.

Since 22 April, when the authorities had torn down the posters, the college gate had been kept closed. People had to show their ID to get in. Visitors had to give their names and sign in. Workers were afraid to leave their names, so almost no outsiders came on to the university campus.

Now, when we demonstrators marched towards the gate, our way was blocked by the university authorities. The college Party secretary

was there. 'Don't go out,' he said. 'Don't be taken in by a handful of bad people. We can protect you as long as you are on the campus, but once you are outside, we can't take any responsibility.' We ignored him and moved towards the gate. 'If you want to go out,' he said, 'you'll have to walk over me.' We brushed him aside and went out through the small door in the gate.

Outside, the liaison man talked to us about the movement in Beijing. More people gathered. I told Chen we should not go far this time; we should just go to the Drum Tower and give a few speeches, and avoid any conflict with the police.

As we walked down the street, I saw one of the department Party secretaries among the demonstrators. I asked him what he thought of the student movement. He said he felt the basic demands of the students were correct, but that they should be sure to maintain self-control and reason, and not be used by bad people. This man was, I knew, conservative, himself a political official – yet even he would now voice his complaints. Dissatisfaction was so widespread that it had reached even Party officials. The radical notion that people should have a say in running their own country had started to take hold.

On 26 April, an editorial appeared in the *People's Daily*. It described the present student movement as a riot being stirred up by a small group of people whose purpose was to overthrow the proletarian dictatorship, socialism and the Communist Party. It called on all people to suppress this riot by every possible means. Clearly the Party and Government were launching a counter-attack, and this editorial became one of the crucial issues in all our future thinking and campaigning. It had become impossible to carry on the movement in Nanjing. We were bitter, and not a little frightened. We expected that measures taken against the activists would be very severe. I thought we should go underground if danger came. We should appear naïve and say that it was only out of concern for the country that we took part in the demonstrations.

When I saw Chen Xuedong, I was surprised by his calm. He said he had prepared for this day ever since he put his name on the big-character poster. He knew that every student movement since 1949 had ended in failure and after every one the leaders were punished. Yet he was certain that what he believed in would one day be acceptable and his work carried on. Once people understood the concept of freedom they would want to live freely.

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After I got back, I shut myself in my room for the rest of the day. I asked myself if there was any hope for us. The reformers in the Party had no clear sense of purpose. Now that the democratic forces were being suppressed, what lay in store for China? Corruption was rampant, the educational system was grossly inadequate, morality being corroded.

I could not accept defeat. That afternoon I decided to go to Beijing. I wanted to give it a last try. I knew the prospects were grim. The 26 April editorial said clearly that the handful of instigators would be severely punished. If I went to Beijing myself, I would definitely belong to that handful.

I didn't tell anyone I was leaving. In my dormitory room I had about five hundred books that I loved. In my drawers there were letters from friends. There were also manuscripts I had written on economic reform, on philosophy, on the pursuit of truth. I had planned to collect them into a booklet. There were notes from reading, my diary from middle-school days, and tapes of my favourite music. I had to leave it all behind.

I told only Chen Xuedong I was going to Beijing. He was even paler than usual; he had not slept well for days. He smiled sadly and said if Beijing needed any support from Nanjing he would step forward any time. 'Even if I had only one follower, I would go on to the street,' he said. 'I'm a dead duck, anyway, so what have I to fear from the fire?'

'We two may end up in prison together,' I said. 'Or one of us may stay outside and the other be in prison. The one in prison would at least have food. If both of us were in prison, we would share good and bad.' Then we shook hands and said goodbye.

I didn't say much to my girlfriend Zhao Ming either. I just said I would go and have a look around in Beijing, that I would come back in three or four days. I did not know how long I would be gone, but I didn't want her to worry. She was a simple, kind-hearted person who judged people by instinct. She accepted me without reservation, without any conditions. As I kissed her, I felt very sad. I didn't know what would happen to me on this trip, or what risk she might be taking for my sake, what trouble I might bring to her. But I left anyway.

I carried no baggage; my wardrobe consisted of some extra underwear, which I put in my pockets. In my hand was a bag of fruit my friends bought me. I took no ID with me, since it would be better not to have any if I were arrested on the train. Without ID, I could pretend to be a vagabond; with ID, I could be identified as a troublemaker from Nanjing. And arrest was a real possibility. I didn't intend to buy a ticket to Beijing – I didn't want to give any money to this Government, and besides, I didn't have much money, anyway. I used the tried-and-true method: I bought a platform ticket and got on to the train.

And so I left Nanjing.

All night the train roared on through the darkness.

I had managed to avoid the conductor's demand for a ticket by hiding in the lavatory, but that left me without a seat. The train was terribly overcrowded and the only way I could get any space for myself was to crawl under one of the seats and curl up on the floor. Usually on a trip I would study my fellow passengers, always fascinating, but their feet, which were all I could see (and smell) were much less interesting. Overhead, some people were telling each other's fortunes. 'A person born on the fifth of the month will have a fortune of cherry,' one of them said, mysteriously, 'on the sixth, a fortune of lychee.' According to Chinese tradition, the Eight Diagrams of the I Ching, the theory of yin and yang, and the Five Elements (metal, wood, water, fire and earth), the fate of a person is decided at the moment of birth. I asked myself if that could be true.

I thought about China's history and about the student movements. They had always sprung up in times of crisis when the country was in danger, to give voice to the people's basic demands. The demands of those movements were all vindicated by history, though, in their time, they were always cruelly suppressed.

One thing was clear this time: to protect the movement, we should strengthen our organisation and protect the students; and we should also maintain the purity and rationality of the leadership and the movement. The student movement should not become involved in any power struggle within the Government, and it should not give the authorities any excuse to make use of it. Everything we did must be legal, based on the Constitution. That way, we could begin to make change.

If we were to advance, we must take risks. But how big a risk should we take? If we risked too little, there would be no progress; if we risked too much, the movement would collapse, and all the achievements of the past ten years of reform would be destroyed.

But which strategy should we adopt? If we backed away from further confrontation now, we should try at least to protect the organisation and hold our forces together. If we decided to go forward, we must rally all available forces, and we must be sure that we could still hold the organisation together; maintaining the Independent Students' Union would be the means of protecting any progress we made.

The more I thought about all this, the more excited I became.

I crawled out from under the seat, clambered over those lying on the floor and opened a window. It was daybreak. I knew I had got to my home province of Hebei. As mountains, big and solemn, passed by my window one after another, I remembered the story the Old Foreman told me, about Jing Ke's brave but doomed attempt to assassinate the King of Qin not far from here. And here I was, trying to tame this modern dynasty, more powerful even than the Qin dynasty that the king founded. I had to laugh at myself for even comparing myself to Jing Ke. He had carried a dagger with him on his mission. All I had was some underwear in my pocket, and a head full of dreams.

CHAPTER TEN

Beijing

At the station in Beijing, the ticket collector seemed to be taking his job very seriously. I rehearsed the story I had made up. I would say I was a student at Beijing University who had come to see a friend off, but in the rush I hadn't had time to buy a send-off ticket. I didn't know whether the story would work. If it didn't, I would probably be taken to an office for interrogation. I started to tell my story, but he didn't even let me finish. With a pat on my shoulder he sent me on my way and, as I turned back to look at him, he put one hand behind his back and gave me the V sign. Clearly, things were different here in Beijing.

On the street, the festive atmosphere was almost palpable. People stood in groups talking avidly. When I went over to one knot to ask what had happened, they looked at me in amazement. 'What? You haven't heard?' they asked. 'Didn't you know there was a big demonstration yesterday?'

'Yesterday?' I said stupidly. 'What kind of demonstration?'

Excitedly, they all started trying to tell me. One worker said, 'I've never seen such a great demonstration since the People's Republic was founded. Two hundred thousand students marched! Imagine it – two hundred thousand.'

Another took up the tale. 'They say that there were more than a million people stood along the way, hailing the demonstrators and giving them lemonade and bread. The students just walked through the police blockade lines like they weren't even there.' He shook his head in amazed recollection.

happened. Even the vagabonds and thieves were on their good behaviour this time. No one wanted to stir up trouble.'

'These students,' said another worker, 'they're all right. They didn't want to go on strike. But they had to do it to get the officials to sit down and talk.'

'And they'll do it,' said the first. 'They'll do it, sooner or later.'

On the bus it was more of the same. People talked about the good spirits and rationality of the students. The demonstrators had walked peacefully all over the city of Beijing for fourteen hours.

The people on the bus described the slogans on the banners they remembered. One said, 'Mama, we're not wrong.' Another read, 'If we are beaten during the demonstration, it means the country is beaten.'

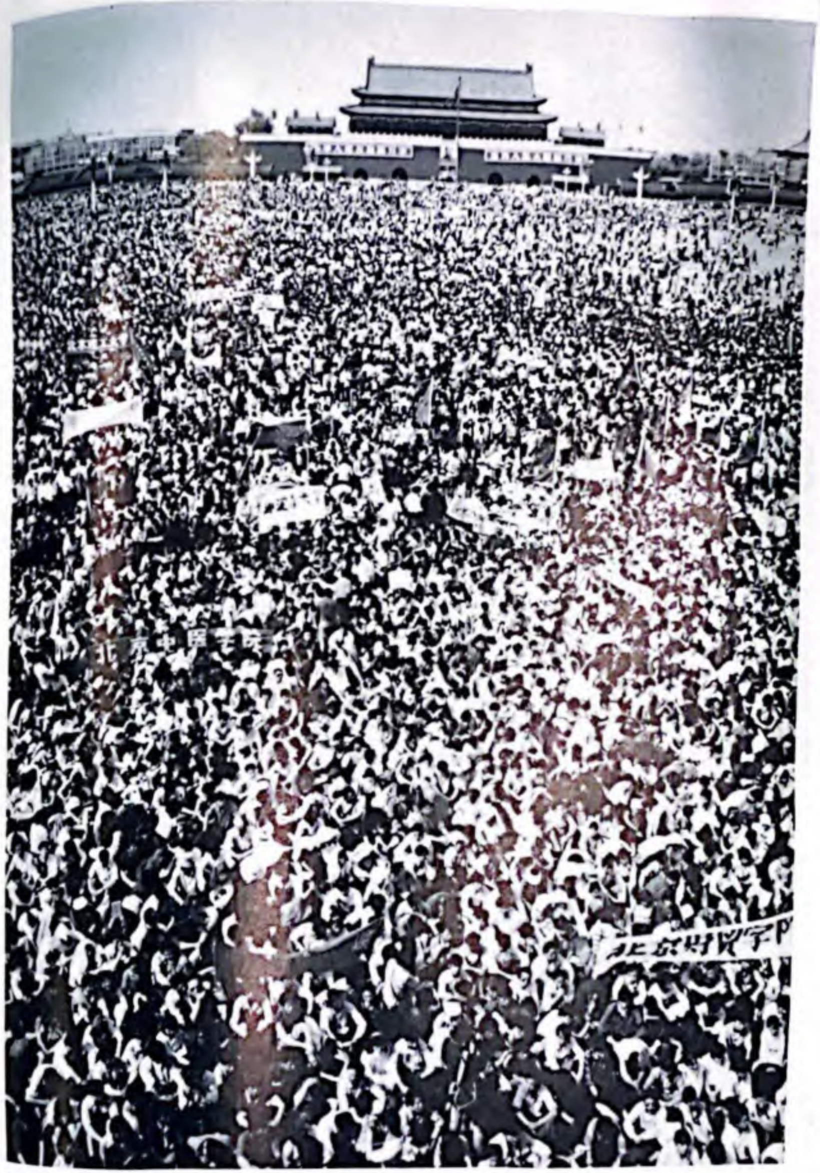
'And every time they broke through a police line,' one woman said, 'they would shout, "Long live the police!" or "The people's police love the people; the people love the police!" They were so considerate.'

I got off the bus at Tiananmen Square, the centre of the city and the focus of this demonstration, as it had been of so many others. It's a vast square, nearly a kilometre long and half as wide again, named after Tiananmen, the Gate of Heavenly Peace, the blood-red entrance to the Forbidden City, on the north side of the square. Mao's mausoleum is at the far end, on the south, the Great Hall of the People on the west, and the Revolutionary Museum and the Museum of History on the east. Right in the centre, raised on a base of three stepped terraces, is a tall, slender obelisk, the Monument to the People's Heroes.

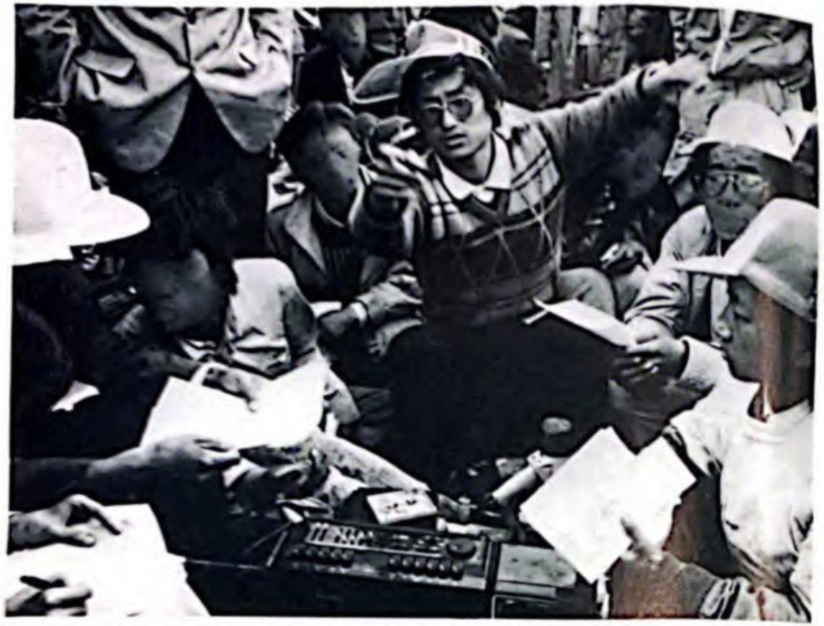
Today the square seemed crowded, thronged with people. I tried to imagine it full of marchers – 200,000 students. I thought of them moving along the avenues, cheered on by the people on either side.

This student movement was not like those before, I decided. Before, when the authorities suppressed a movement people dispersed. But not this time. Now they marched on, and on, and on, past cheering crowds, through police barricades. I had sensed a new strength in the demonstrations in Nanjing, but here the difference was much clearer. No matter where I went, when people knew or guessed I was a student, they would give the V sign and shout, 'Long live the students!'

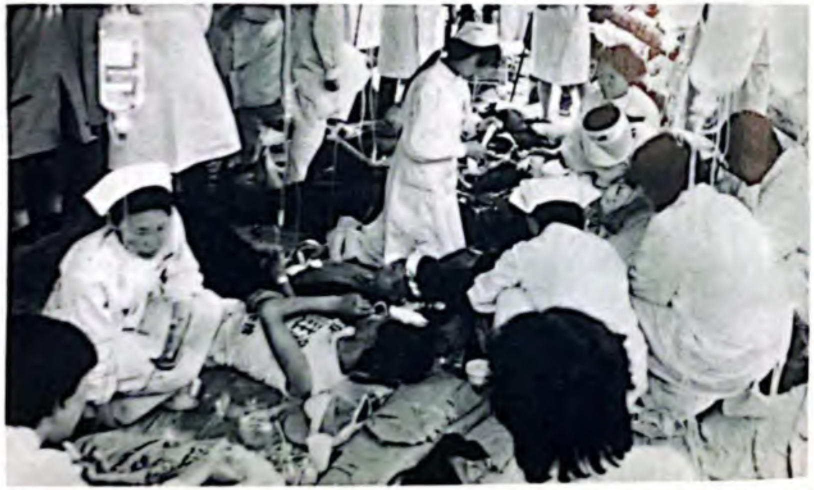
Things would be different this time.



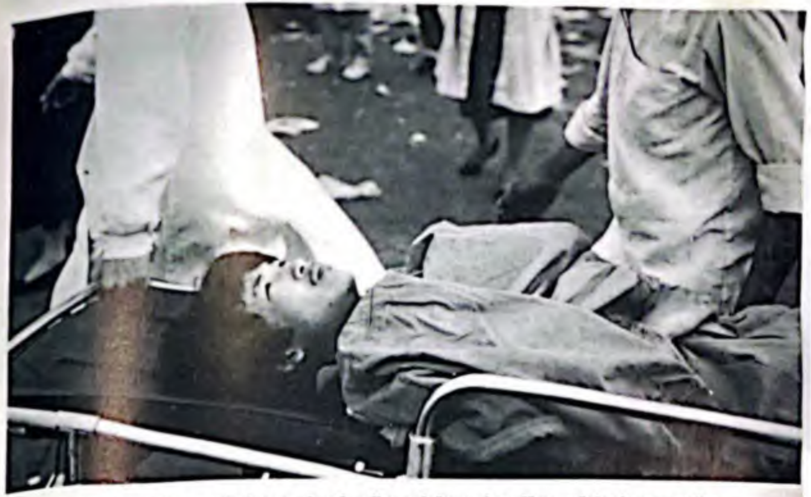
On 13 May, at the height of the student movement in Tiananmen Square, as many as 10 million people participated in the demonstrations. I remember this as the most glorious moment of our Tiananmen Square Republic. The Government reported demonstrations in eighty-four Chinese cities during this time. *Peter Turnley, Black Star*



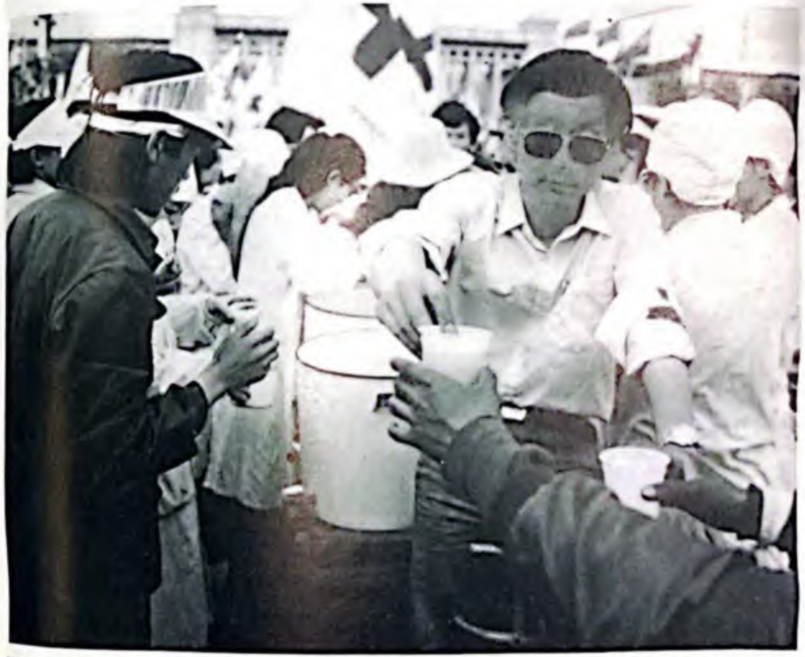
Chai Ling with me at the centre of the Hunger Strike Command Post on 16 May, issuing emergency directives to be broadcast around the square. *Patrick Zachmann, Magnum*



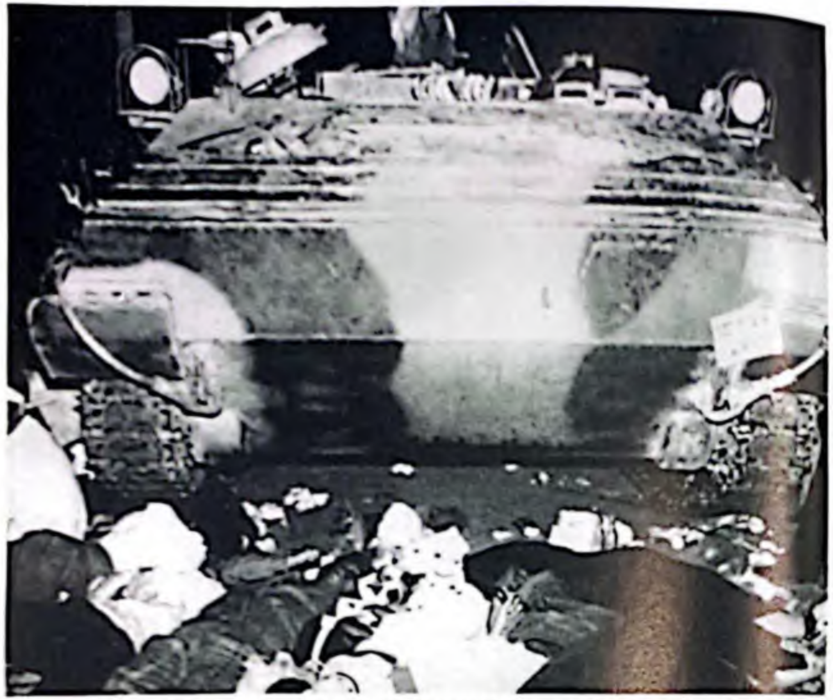
Volunteer doctors and nurses provide assistance under a medical tent to the weak and suffering among the 3,600 strikers. At the height of the seven-day hunger strike, ambulance sirens sounded every minute and as many as a thousand students fainted in one day. *Erica Lansner, Photoreporters*



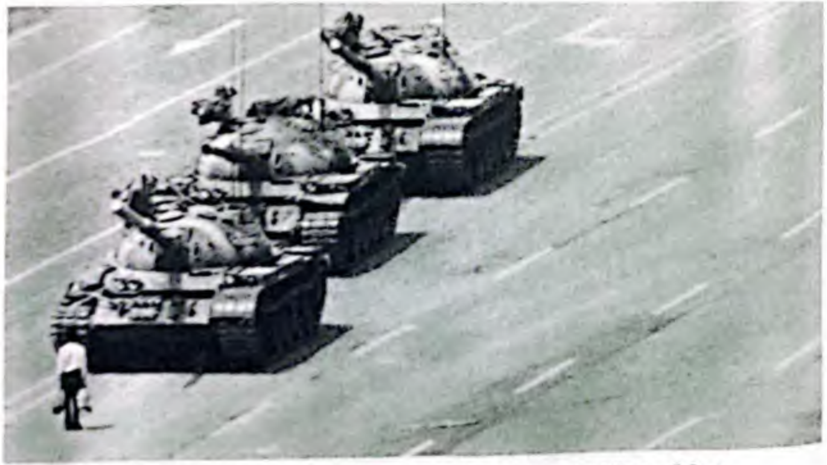
Doctors carry me to the medical tent after I collapsed from the effects of the hunger strike. *J. Langevin, Sygma*



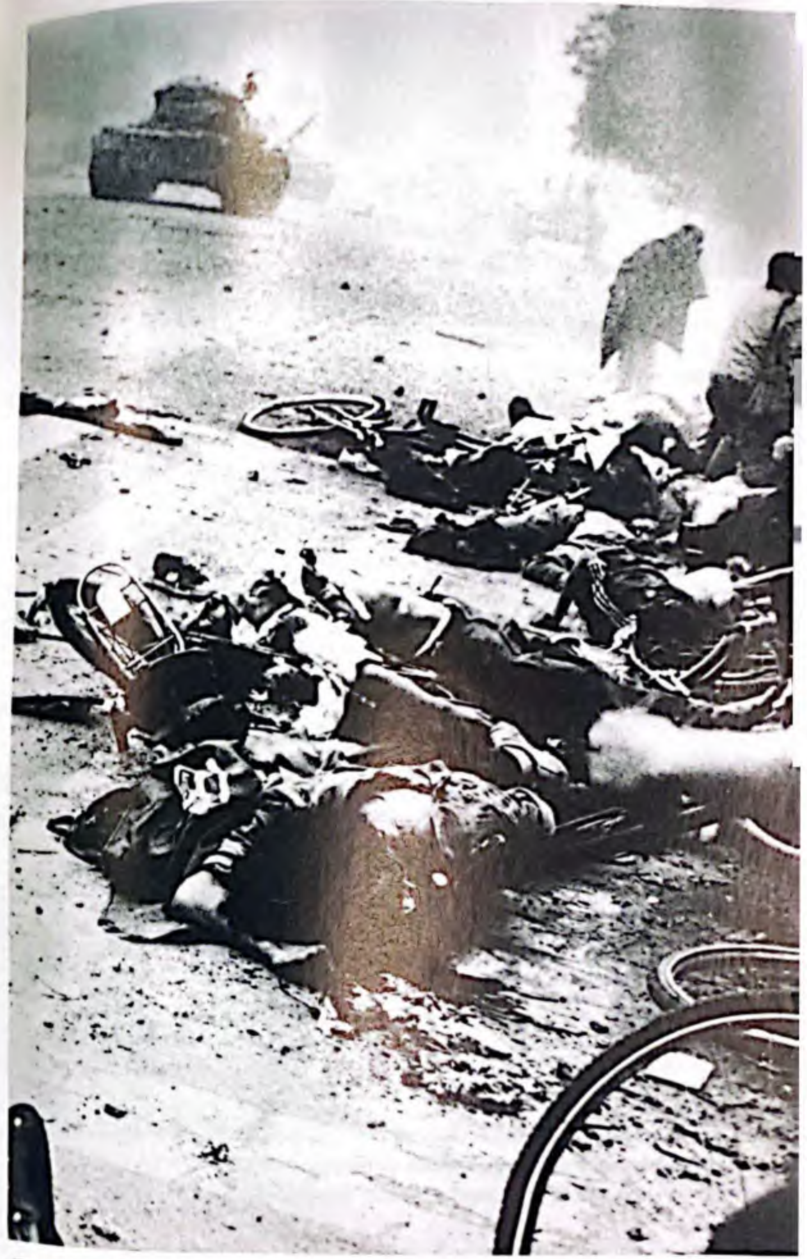
Volunteers dispense water to hunger strikers on 16 May. To intensify the message of the strike, some students refused water as well as food at this point. *J. Langevin, Sygma*



Students block a tank to prevent troops from entering central Beijing on 21 May, the first day of martial law. *AP/Wide World Photos*



Wang Weilin, a courageous nineteen-year-old student, halts a convoy of tanks on 5 June. *Reuters/Bettmann Newsphotos*



The morning after the massacre of 4 June. *Gamma-Liaison*

I appear with Chai Ling *(centre)* and Feng Congde *(right)* on the Government's 'Twenty-one Most Wanted' poster.

Two deputies and their commander – best friends moving the mountain together.
Mingbao Weekly

That night I went to Beijing University, several miles north and west of Tiananmen. If Tiananmen was the focus of the marches, this was the nerve centre, the brain, the starting point of the strike.

I was reading some of the hundreds of posters when I heard someone call out my name. It was Tan Chong, whom I had known at Nanjing. He seemed very pleased to see me and introduced me to some of his friends.

One had been a classmate of his at Nanjing, where he had studied Marxism. He had found that what Marx wrote was nothing like what he was taught by the Chinese Communist Party and had been fairly outspoken about his discovery. In consequence, he had been assigned a teaching job in a remote mountain village but, hearing the news from Beijing, had come to join the movement. We smiled and shook hands, calling ourselves professional revolutionaries. He had come here the same way I had – on a train, without a ticket.

The loudspeakers all around were broadcasting all kinds of things. A worker was saying, 'I'm not afraid. In the demonstration yesterday I saw clearly what the students were doing. They have already sacrificed a lot, and they're ready to sacrifice more. Some of them wrote their wills before they went on the march, just in case. I'll stand with the students and support them.' Applause greeted his statement. Many intellectuals made speeches too. They called the 27 April demonstration a big victory for all the people. Like me, most of the speakers had come from distant places in the country. They were of many different ages and most of them had been persecuted in varying degrees over the past forty years.

Tan Chong's friend also wanted to say something in the broadcast. When his turn came, he was so excited he found it hard to put his ideas in words. He admired the student leaders at the forefront, he said. He warned them of the persecution that would be imposed on them. He said he had come to Beijing from afar to show the heart of an intellectual in support of the movement.

At midnight I went looking for an empty bed and found one in a room where students were writing posters. They were still exhilarated from yesterday's demonstration and told me that they had been very worried before they started out because of the editorial that had appeared on 26 April. But it had not deterred them; in fact, it was the main impetus for the demonstration. They had also heard that the 38th Army had been summoned to Beijing to be ready to put down the students. Throughout the afternoon and evening of 26

April, Party secretaries at all levels tried to persuade them not to demonstrate but by that time their purpose was firm.

One student wrote to his mother saying, 'Mama, I love you. But I have to go and take part in the demonstration for the freedom and modernisation of our country. I want to prove to the world that I love you, I love mothers, and I love my motherland. If we don't take part in the demonstration, our country will be beaten, our people will be beaten.'

On the morning of 27 April, the leaders of the Independent Students' Union of Beijing advised that the demonstration be cancelled. But by then nobody could have stopped it.

I asked about the student leaders and was told that usually the idea of a demonstration came first, and then some people would come forward to organise it. There seemed to be leadership problems among the students in Beijing, and I couldn't tell if there were too many leaders or not enough.

The next day I went to see Yu Jiang. He was highly unusual, educated in Britain and France; before 1949 he led many underground activities for the Communist Party in China. He still has close contacts with the Party leadership. He was totally different from the person I had met a few months before. He was in high spirits; his pessimism had vanished. He thought this movement would turn out to be as significant as the May Fourth Movement of 1919, that it was the first true rebellion against Communist rule in forty years. But he thought we should be very careful to make our movement and organisation completely legal, and that it be recognised by the authorities as such. We must get rid of the 'riot' label that had been applied to us. We should also get news out to the rest of the world, he said. This was most important. If the real situation was known abroad, the authorities would be more cautious in taking extreme measures.

That afternoon I saw on television the first dialogue between officials and a group of about thirty students. The officials included Yuan Mu, a cadre of vice-ministerial rank; Huo Tongchang, director of the National Educational Committee; and Yuan Liban, a clerk from the Beijing municipal Party committee. The other side were 'representatives' of the students who did not look like student leaders – or even students, for that matter.

From beginning to end, Yuan Mu ran the show. He said quite a lot and then let the students say a few words. The spokesman on the student side was a leader of the official – and totally unrepresentative – students' union. Throughout this uneven dialogue, Yuan Mu insisted that the present student movement was manipulated by a handful of bad elements. The Government and Party had made mistakes, but they would be gradually corrected. The students' demands and requests would be taken into consideration. But students should not threaten the stability of the country. Stability was most important. The speech could have been written by the university president in Nanjing, or by any other Party functionary.

Only one student said anything substantial. He said the students could not accept the word 'riot' as the label for the movement. Then he mentioned the distortion of the 20 April incident in the official media. Lastly he said the Government had violated Article 35 of the Constitution by depriving the students of their right to demonstrate. He was very persuasive.

There was one other good speech, by a student from the Beijing Institute of Aviation. He said this dialogue was not what students wanted. No top Party or Government leaders were present. The student representatives had not been elected, they had been selected by the Government from the official students' union. The students did not have an equal chance to speak. 'I'm not interested in this meeting,' he concluded. 'I choose to withdraw.'

But with those two exceptions, the dialogue was a sham. It was as if grown-ups were saying to children, 'You're still young. You don't really know anything about Party and state affairs. We have good reasons for everything we do. You don't; you're being manipulated by a few bad people. You're doing what they tell you to do, which is not what you meant to do. The so-called facts are not true.'

When I went back to Beijing University that night, the Voice of Democracy was full of angry voices. It was a local broadcasting station – not a radio station, but a microphone, amplifiers and loudspeakers set up at the beginning of the movement by donations from students, to give voice to the movement on the campus.

That night Zhou Yong Jun was advised to resign as head of the Independent Students' Union of Beijing University, since he decided to cancel the 27 April demonstration without discussing it with other students. In the early days of the movement, there were no effective ways of voting for leaders – there was never time to canvass all the students, much less for them to judge the capacity of the candidates. But this was to some extent made up for by a fairly effective, informal, and very swift method of removal: if the members of the movement were dissatisfied with the actions of a leader, they would advise him or her to resign, and no leader survived in the face of such concerted advice. Now Zhou resigned, and Wuer Kaixi replaced him. Three days later, Wuer Kaixi was also removed, and Feng Congde replaced him. Feng became the last chairman of the Independent Students' Union of Beijing Universities.

Speaker after speaker denounced the students who took part in the meeting with Yuan Mu and others. Its significance lay only in that it was a meeting between government officials and students, but in no way could it be called a dialogue.

The situation worried me. The various student unions were carping at each other. If the dissension got out of hand, the student movement would destroy itself in bitterness.

I was introduced to Tiao Tiao, who was responsible for the external affairs of the Independent Students' Union and was later put on the wanted list by the Government. When I said I was from Nanjing University, he looked me up and down and told me to show him my ID and report on the situation in Nanjing. During all this, he was seated and kept me standing, a leader addressing his subordinate. I was very insulted and angry. Of course I did not have any ID, since I had left it behind. 'For reasons of collective security,' he said, 'we don't receive anyone without a valid ID.'

Bitterly disappointed, I left. In another room the secretariat of the student union was having a meeting. I pretended that I was one of them and sat down to listen.

I noticed a girl who looked a bit different from the others. She was listening seriously to whoever was speaking. She was quick to respond to people's comments. She was amazingly unkempt and unattractive: her face was dirty, her jacket was rumpled and loose, and she wore a pair of wrinkled jeans. She looked like a boy. When she talked, she hardly opened her mouth. But she was clearly a sincere and kind-hearted person. When I asked who this little woman was, I was told she was Chai Ling, the secretary-general of the secretariat and that she was conducting the meeting.

When there was a break, I introduced myself as a student from Nanjing University and said I would like to talk to her outside for just a minute. To my surprise, she came out with me and we talked about the situation. I talked rapidly, trying to convince her that I was a real student who had thought carefully about the situation. I said that we should set up our own organisation through democratic measures and force the Government to accept us as legitimate because only then could we get involved in politics and play a role representing the people. Freedom of the press could help protect the development of democracy and awaken people's consciousness to political reform. The sham dialogue with the Government on 29 April proved that danger was in the air and we must be prepared to defend ourselves.

'You're right,' she said. 'Most of the students think we've already won. They're no longer interested in demonstrations. They don't know that though we have won a victory, it was a very small victory.' Though she looked so weak, there was obviously great strength in Chai Ling.

I asked, 'When did you start to take part in the movement?'

'I took the present position after 22 April. I have only slept three or four hours a day since then. My husband is a member of the standing committee of the citywide Independent Students' Union. We haven't seen each other much.' She smiled wryly. 'Now, what do you think should be done next?'

'For one thing, we should stop the bickering between the old official students' union and the new independent one. The two should join forces and elect a new leadership, democratically, including people from both organisations. Even when the movement ends, we must have a strong organisation of our own.

'Then we should support freedom of press by supporting Qing Benli.' Qing, the editor-in-chief of the *World Economic Journal*, had recently been fired by the Shanghai municipal Party committee. 'We should persist in asking for dialogue with the Government and get them to negate the 26 April editorial. But the most important thing is to strengthen our organisation, because the Government is capable of doing anything.'

'Yes, it is. Our phones are bugged. Most of the student leaders are already on their blacklist. They've got dossiers on every last one of us.' When she said this, she looked as if she was saying that life was so beautiful and it would be such a pity if one lost it. Chai Ling had both a mother's strength and the naïveté of a little girl. When she talked about what the Government had done, I felt the indignation and courage in her.

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On 1 May there was a press conference at which I got to know two more important student leaders, Wang Dan and Feng Congde. I was deeply impressed by Wang Dan as he answered questions at a meeting that day. His appearance was unimpressive. He had no trace of stardom about him. He wore a greenish-grey zippered jacket that was always open in front, showing a nondescript T-shirt. His trousers were grey, and he wore cheap cloth shoes. From the first day I met him till the last time I saw him, he wore the same simple clothes.

Wang was very easy to get on with. He was the opposite of Wuer Kaixi – he had none of Wuer's charm, but he had great internal strength. He was always calm and steady and when he answered questions, he was logical, alert, and sensitive. He was able to unite people; in consequence he was the most popular leader.

Feng Congde, who was Chai Ling's husband, looked gaunt and exhausted from overwork. He always wore the same black Western suit which became his trademark on the square. He spoke in short, concise sentences, conveying both honesty and humility.

The Independent Students' Union of Beijing Universities issued an open letter at that 1 May press conference. It criticised the dialogue of 29 April and called on the Government to talk with representatives from the new independent union, which genuinely represented the interests of the students.

On 3 May, Yuan Mu dismissed the Independent Union's demands, and said that the Government would not have any dialogue with the illegitimate, unregistered group. The demands, the proposed basis for the dialogue, had worried me when I first read them. I told Chai Ling that I thought the Independent Union had been established in too much of a rush. My suggestion was that it either revise the points for the dialogue with the Government, or stop asking for dialogue until we managed to consolidate the organisation, including the old union, and have all the students elect the leaders.

Chai Ling told me that at Beijing University the students voted to choose between the two students' unions to represent them as there was no time for a full election of officers. This seemed, under the circumstances, to be a good method. I suggested that every school should do the same, and then the citywide union could elect representatives for a dialogue with the Government.

On 3 May I met another student leader, Xiong Yan, a law student. He was older, about twenty-five, very impressive. He told me that the Independent Students' Union of Beijing University had decided to form an independent delegation of student representatives for talks with the Government. The representatives would be elected at their own colleges. Xiong told me the head of the delegation would be Xiang Xiaoji, a student from the University of Politics and Law. He was the one who had spoken most clearly at the meeting with Yuan Mu on 29 April. His speech had left a deep impression for its clear reasoning and precision.

At Beijing University, Xiong Yan was responsible for the work of electing representatives for the dialogue, and he worked hard at examining the candidates. Each one made a speech and the students commented and elected the representatives from among them. In his own speeches, he was eloquent and analytical. Later, he took part in the televised meeting with Li Peng on 18 May, and always hit the nail on the head. Xiong was remarkably far-sighted; his analyses prove valid even now.

There was much debate about whether to hold another demonstration on 4 May, to commemorate the May Fourth Movement of 1919. Clearly the Government would oppose it and this time take punitive measures. Their message was that if the students wanted a dialogue, they must not hold a demonstration on 4 May. If we were to go ahead, soldiers and policemen would be sent in to keep order.

On the evening of 3 May, the atmosphere was very tense. News came that several army units were gathered around Beijing; the police had been ordered to stop the demonstration at any cost.

I felt we must demonstrate on 4 May. If we missed this opportunity, it would be very hard to find another chance. The first demonstration honoured Hu Yaobang. On 27 April we had marched to show our opposition to the 26 April editorial. May 4 would be the last chance to demonstrate; if we waited longer, the momentum would be lost.

This was the first time I took part in a demonstration in Beijing. Though there weren't as many participants as on 27 April – about 200,000 – their spirit and determination were evident.

People came out of their houses and shops to hail the demonstrators when they went past. Shop workers brought out food and drinks for us. I saw the owner of one store scolding his employees.

'Why did you give them Coca-Cola and not some ordinary lemonade? It was much more expensive.'

The employees said, 'We'll pay for what we took out. Don't you worry.' People applauded and the owner blushed.

A monk was among the demonstrators. He wore his robe and held a piece of yellow cloth in his hand with the character *fo* (Buddhism) on it. He was very conspicuous and people cheered when he walked past them. He shouted, 'Buddhists support democracy. Long live freedom of belief.'

Li Peng had demanded that the presidents of the big universities of Beijing hand over their student leaders to the Government to no avail. Now teachers, long considered the most conservative intellectuals in society, were joining the demonstrators.

Every time we broke through a police line, we would shout the old slogan, 'The People's police love the People, and the People love People's police', and add a new one, 'We are for raising police salaries!' Most of the policemen looked happy; some even gave us the V sign.

Finally we made it to the centre of the city, to Tiananmen Square. There something extraordinary happened. Some eight hundred people came into the square from the East Chang'an Avenue, carrying banners: 'Journalists support the students.' 'Don't force us to tell lies. We renounce them.' 'The 26 April editorial was not written by us.'

This was something totally unprecedented: the Party's media were rising up in rebellion. With great excitement, people applauded them. They were asked to walk around Tiananmen Square three times. The elderly were saying, 'The *People's Daily* has been telling lies for forty years. Who'd have thought that journalists would ever come out and say they actually wanted to tell the truth?'

After the demonstration of 4 May, Zhao Ziyang, then the Party general secretary, gave a seemingly moderate speech about the student movement at a conference of the World Bank. He used eight Chinese characters to describe the way in which to resolve the problems posited by the student movement: 'Reason, coolness, self-control and order.' He said the student movement was not a riot and that problems could be solved through dialogue.

Yu Jiang didn't think much of Zhao. 'He'll watch in safety while others fight,' Yu said, 'then reap the spoils when both sides are exhausted.' Zhao was making use of the student movement to attack his political enemies – Li Peng and his like. It was hard to predict what Zhao's attitude might be if he succeeded in subduing his enemies and gaining control of the Party and Government. We would have to see if he actually recognised the Independent Students' Union and rescinded the 26 April editorial.

There were several other developments after the demonstration of 4 May. One was the rebellion of media workers. On 9 May more than a thousand journalists handed in a petition to the State Council demanding freedom of the press. On 10 May, students from Beijing University and Qinghua University organised a bicycle demonstration supporting the journalists. Dozens of writers came out on bicycles in support of the student movement. All this encouraged the students and brought them closer together with journalists and writers.

Before 4 May, the Independent Students' Union had tried several times for dialogue with the Government, but was rebuffed. The Union made some concessions and established a representative delegation, which drafted three items for the dialogue. One was the nature of the student movement: it must be acknowledged as a patriotic and democratic movement. The second was to develop democracy in every aspect of life, starting on campus. The third was to discuss Article 35 of the Constitution and how to implement its provisions. On 6 May the students sent in their proposals. The Party central committee said they would answer on 8 May.

Everybody was waiting. The students had already made several concessions. They asked for a true dialogue which would address the issues and receive guarantees of action. The Party and government leaders were only prepared to receive the students as petitioners, making a show of reason but granting no guarantees, no certain reforms. The students asked to have the meeting televised live. The authorities said they might be prepared to have the meeting shown on television afterwards. The students wanted to meet with real leaders, top secretaries and premiers; the Government would not send anyone above ministerial level – which is relatively powerless in China. They would not allow the leaders of the Independent Students' Union to attend the meeting, but only the discredited 'leaders' of the official students' union.

May 8 arrived, but nothing from the top.

On 10 May we were told 11 May would bring news.

On 12 May we were told 13 May was the day we would get the news.

Had there been some response on 13 May, the hunger strike might not have happened. But that period of communication ended on 13 May.

After 4 May, many students thought we had won, that no more struggle was needed. If there was dialogue with the Government, they thought, all would be well. The Government encouraged hopes of dialogue, believing that the force of the movement would dissipate. And students at the smaller colleges had returned to class; eventually, after 11 May, even the large universities prepared to resume classes.

Beijing University was left to hold out alone. There, students continued to strike. They saw clearly that the Party and Government were anxious to settle the students, and were only biding their time.

An outside factor came into play here: Mikhail Gorbachev would be visiting on 15 May, the first time that a leader of the Soviet Union had visited China. The leaders of China, intent on saving face before the world, didn't want fresh blood on their hands when Gorbachev arrived. After Gorbachev's visit, though, they would be ready to crush these troublesome students.

To avoid this tragic dénouement, we would have to increase the pressure, and do so before Gorbachev arrived. We had to do something that would threaten to embarrass the leadership during the state visit – and acutely enough to force them into the dialogue they had been avoiding. It must be something that would involve even more of our potential allies, something that would encourage them, shame them, or *force* them to stand up and be counted on our side.

We decided on a hunger strike. Only then would the teachers come out to support the students since they could not stand idly by while their children starved. With the teachers all society would show sympathy with the student movement. The majority of students were full of indignation, ready for the next step; they were pushing their leaders forward to action.

Earlier I had had a talk with Chai Ling. She was pessimistic. She looked pale and weak. Her lips were cracked, her face dirty. She was still in her loose shirt and jeans and tennis shoes. She was clearly wondering what we should do next. She knew that severe punishment awaited the students; that plain-clothes police were all over Beijing University. Her parents had come to visit her, and she did not know whether she would ever see them again.

At this point, most of the students did not see any danger ahead; they were still hoping for the promised dialogue. Chai Ling, though, was in despair. For her the decision to go on hunger strike came from feeling, not from reasoning, as it did with me. Love and responsibility drove her to it.

At first most of the leaders of the Independent Students' Union would not support her but Wang Dan and Ma Shaofang did, and

they persuaded the others. Initially only seven students from Beijing University decided to go on hunger strike. The number grew to forty.

Then Chai Ling made her speech, which became the manifesto of the student hunger strikers. Later, it became the hunger striker's last will and testament too. It was copied on tape, printed and reprinted.

As I listened to her speak through the loudspeakers in Beijing University on 12 May, through the Voice of Democracy, it was then that I cried.

> In these glorious sunny days of May, we are on hunger strike. In this most wonderful time of our youth, we have no choice but to leave behind us the best things life has to offer. How unwilling we are! How reluctant are our hearts!
>
> Alas, our nation has come to this: uncontrolled inflation, endemic nepotism, high-handed despotism, widespread official corruption. An ever-increasing number of benevolent and principled men and women are forced to lead exiled lives overseas; daily, our society has become even more unsafe. Countrymen, all our countrymen of good will, please listen to our entreaty! This nation is our nation, these people are our people, this government is our government. If we do not speak, who will? If we do not act, who will?
>
> Even though our shoulders are still young and fragile, even though death, to us, is too heavy a burden to bear, we have decided to take our leave. We have no choice but to take our leave. History demands this from us.
>
> We feel the purest patriotism, we offer the finest of our heart and soul, yet we have been described as 'rioting', with 'ulterior motives', and 'being used by a small group of people'.
>
> We would like to plead with every honest citizen of China, with every worker, peasant, soldier, intellectual, famous person, ordinary person, government official, policeman, and with those who say we are the guilty ones, that you put your hand on your heart, ask the goodness that is in your heart, what are we guilty of? Are we rioting? We go on a class strike, we demonstrate peacefully, we embark on a hunger strike, we are forced to hide – what are all these for? Our emotions have been manipulated time and again, we endure hunger to seek truth, but are met with police brutality. Our student representatives went down on their knees to plead for democracy, but the Government pretended not to see. Our request for equal dialogue has been delayed again and again. Our student leaders face mortal dangers . . .
>
> What are we to do?

Democracy is life's greatest safeguard for the preservation of our well-being. Freedom is our heaven-given right since the beginning of man. Yet now we have to fight for them with our young lives. Can the Chinese people be proud of this?

We have no choice but to go on hunger strike. It is our only choice. We use courage that enables us to face death, to fight for the life that's worth living.

But we are still children, we are still children! China our mother, please take a good look at your sons and daughters. Hunger is destroying their youth, death is stalking ever closer to them. Can you remain unmoved?

We do not want to die. We want to continue to live, and live well. Because the best times of our lives are yet before us, we really do not want to die. We want to study well, since our nation is so poor. It may seem that we have forsaken our nation to die, but death is definitely not what we are after. However, if one person's death, or a few people's deaths, can enable more people to lead better lives, and can help our nation to become more prosperous, we then have not the right to continue living stealthily.

When we are enduring hunger, fathers and mothers, don't be sad. When we are saying farewell to life, uncles and aunts, please don't break your hearts. We have only one wish, that is to allow all of us to lead better lives. We have only one request: please do not forget that what we are seeking is in no way death. For we know democracy is not the affair of a few, and the realisation of democracy cannot be completed simply by one generation.

Death is awaiting the echo that is most universal and immemorial.

When a man is about to die,
His words would be kind.
When a horse is about to expire,
His cries would be sorrowful.

Farewell, comrades, take care! May those who die and those who live share the same loyalty.

Farewell, beloved, take care! I cannot bear to take leave of you, yet there is no choice but to take leave.

Farewell, our parents! Please forgive us, your children cannot manage to be loyal and filial at the same time.

Farewell, our people! Please permit us to demonstrate to you our loyalty in this desperate fashion.

With our lives we have written this attestation, must make clear the sky of our republic!

The reasons for the hunger strike are:

(1) We protest against the Government's cold and indifferent attitude towards the Beijing students' strike.
(2) We protest against the Government's extended delays in carrying out a dialogue with the Beijing Independent Students' Dialogue Delegation.
(3) We protest against the Government's insistence on mislabelling the students' democratic and patriotic movement as 'rioting', and all other associated misreporting.

The requests of the hunger strikers are:

(1) We request the Government to begin a dialogue immediately with the Beijing Independent Students' Dialogue Delegation in a practical, concrete and equal manner.
(2) We request the Government to give this student movement the true label and fair assessment, stipulating that it is a patriotic, democratic student movement.

The time of the hunger strike:
13 May 1989, 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

The place of the hunger strike:
Tiananmen Square.

After Chai Ling's speech, more than two hundred students from Beijing University signed up for the hunger strike. More than a thousand cassette tapes of her speech were copied and sent off to different colleges. Many more students joined the hunger strike after hearing the tapes. When the army of hunger strikers reached Tiananmen Square, there were more than eight hundred. The most important thing was to inform the people of Beijing of the hunger strike and call on them to protect the participants to prevent them from being kidnapped by the authorities.

I longed to see Chai Ling, but I could not find her. At noon, the two hundred hunger strikers from Beijing University were invited by their teachers to have their last lunch in Yan Chung Yuan. People said little; there were no speeches. On everybody's head was a band on which was written 'Give me liberty, or give me death.' They all wore white vests over their jackets or shirts; some had mottoes written on them too: 'I starve for China; I cry for China', 'Mama, I am hungry, but I cannot eat'. 'I love rice, but I love truth more'. ~~Everybody was given a piece of paper and a pen to write their will. It was a sad and solemn meal. Tears coursed down some people's faces, but nobody cried aloud.~~

~~After the lunch we gathered~~ on the famous triangular area of Beijing University where every student movement began, ready to start off. I saw Chai Ling among the crowd. She looked just the same, the same black and dirty face, the same cracked lips, the same clothes. The only difference was her big white vest over her shirt. On its front were the words 'Chai Ling is on hunger strike', and on its back 'I cry for China'.

She ran over to me and asked me, 'Are we going to die?'

The loudspeaker was still broadcasting her speech. I asked her whether she wrote it. She said yes. I told her I had never been so moved.

Teachers and students lined the campus walks, holding banners saying 'Seeing off our warriors', evoking the scene over two thousand years ago when the people of Yan bade Jing Ke their last farewell. There were tears in their eyes.

I rode on a bicycle with Chai Ling sitting on the rack behind. Xiong Yan was with us too. On the way I gave them the information I had collected in the last few days. I said we had to spread the news of the hunger strike to the whole country. Then I asked, 'Why should you leaders also go on hunger strike? You shouldn't. If your health is weakened, you won't be clear-headed, and who is to lead the movement?'

'But how can I *not* participate in the hunger strike?' asked Chai Ling. 'I called on the students to do so. I have to be one of them. My husband Feng Congde and Jai Yong will take care of all the work we've just talked about. They are not on hunger strike.'

For the rest of the way to Tiananmen Square we were all silent. People walked on solemnly. In their eyes there was a last longing for life. I looked over my shoulder at Chai Ling. She was actually very beautiful. She was looking at the leaves she had picked from the trees.

Again I thought of the story of Jing Ke. Was our rival the King of Qin? Would he kill us? We had no daggers; what we had were pure, loving hearts. We were not going to assassinate any kings. We were going to move them with our hearts.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Hunger Strike

When we arrived, Tiananmen Square was crowded with people. Every college had sent supporters. The hunger strikers stayed to the north of the Monument to the People's Heroes, many of them sitting in the manner of a monk praying. A big circle of students protected the strikers. Surrounding them were crowds of people come to show their support. People were curious, excited and angry with the authorities.

At 5 p.m. a banner rose to hang between the two flagpoles in front of the monument. On it Feng Congde had written two big characters in black, 'Hunger Strike'. The square suddenly fell silent.

Wang Dan announced the purpose and conditions of the hunger strike. Then he led us in our pledge:

> I take my pledge: for democracy to exist and develop in our country, for the prosperity of our motherland. I am determined to take part in the hunger strike. I will abide by the discipline of the strike. I will not stop until I achieve my goal.

I squeezed my way to the front of the crowd of hunger strikers to talk to Chai Ling. I said we should get a mimeograph machine and spread the news of the hunger strike to the people as soon as we could. We should move the broadcasting station from Beijing University to here. Her speech should be distributed to every corner of the country. Quilted coats were needed as it was cold at night; salt water should be in plentiful supply. Chai Ling sent people to do all these jobs.

The hunger strikers had to find places to lie down. We crowded against each other – one person's leg on another's arm. We didn't have enough coats, so one coat had to cover several people. We warmed each other with our bodies. Some were reading – Qiong Yao's novels, articles on Gorbachev, political stories. Some were chatting. It was so cold that we couldn't go to sleep. We stood up and sang the 'Internationale'.

I went round asking people how they felt. They all said they had never been so hungry. We started to chat in groups, describing how we felt; there seemed to be a fire burning in our stomachs. We were cold and tired and hungry, and could not sleep. People were asking when all this would end.

We imagined what we would tell our grandchildren. Someone said he would write a book and have his grandchildren read it to see how their old grandpa felt during the hunger strike. People laughed and said we would have to read each other's books. We also decided that we would meet again in Tiananmen Square in fifty years' time. We would bring our grandchildren and our diaries to show each other. And we would see if the grandchildren's generation had to go on hunger strike.

Medical students from the Beijing Medical College went round checking the stickers and distributing liquid. People could get sleeping pills too. Some students started to faint.

I was afraid of two things: one was that we might be dragged away in the middle of the night, the other that some would die in their sleep. The only way to prevent this was to make sure everyone had enough liquid.

We must get more salt water. Perhaps Nightingale could help. Nightingale was my nickname for a friend of mine, a poet and a nurse; she should be on duty now. I went to her hospital and the two of us stole bottles of salt water. She said I could have more if we needed them. But I didn't think the strike would last long. Something should happen by 15 May. As I left she said, 'By giving you the salt water, I've pledged you my support. After work I'll come and participate in your hunger strike.'

I gave some salt water to Chai Ling and to some medical students. They told me that teachers and officials from the universities had come to persuade students to go back. A few government leaders had come too.

On the second day, 14 May, about 300,000 Beijing people had gathered in the square at 2.00 p.m.; a delegation of students met with the government representatives led by Yuan Mingfu, the minister for the United Front and one of Zhao Ziyang's closest allies. People waited anxiously for the outcome of the meeting. After several hours, the hunger strikers became increasingly impatient and Chai Ling decided to speak to them. I suggested that she play the tape of her speech, since it represented what we all felt. If that speech did not move them, if they still called the movement a riot, they must have hearts of stone.

At 7 p.m. the dialogue ended between the student delegation and the government representatives. The students had failed; none of their demands were met. Yuan Mingfu had seemed sincere. He acknowledged that the student movement was not a riot and that there should be no punishment. But he was only a minister. Li Peng and Zhao Ziyang were the ones in charge so Yuan dared not say directly that the students were right. We were all angry at the lack of outcome. The only hopeful sign was that Yuan had asked again and again that the students withdraw from the square, since Gorbachev was arriving the next day, so we knew the central Party committee was really concerned lest it be embarrassed. Perhaps things might change.

There was another exciting development: a group of twelve intellectuals arrived – Dai Qing, a well-known journalist; Li Honglin, a Marxist scholar; Yan Jiaqi, known for his writing on the Cultural Revolution; Su Xiaokang, one of the writers of a famous TV documentary, *River Elegy;* Bao Zunxing, chief editor of *Toward the Future*; and Liu Zaifu, a famous literary critic, were among them. They supported and encouraged the students by making speeches on the square. It was the first time that high-ranking intellectuals had come face to face with the students. Dai Qing spoke on behalf of all twelve:

> We have three requests. One is that the top leaders openly say that the student movement is a patriotic and democratic movement. Another is to recognise the student organisations as legitimate. The third is that there be no violence against the participants in the hunger strike. Anyone who looses violence on them will be a criminal in history.
>
> But some people deliberately want to damage the reforms. For the long-term interest of China, to avoid enemies harming us, in order that Gorbachev's visit may go smoothly, we ask you, students, to accept reason and withdraw temporarily from Tiananmen Square.

> We are willing to negotiate with the Party and government leaders on your behalf to achieve the above three points. If they refuse, we will fight side by side with you.

It sounded good. They were voicing our main demands. But when we calmed down and thought, we realised that they were actually acting on behalf of the Government. Chinese intellectuals are always apprehensive and timid. These, though they openly said they supported the students, actually spoke for the Government. The intellectuals might be able to persuade the students to leave the square but they didn't have the power to guarantee that the Government would not mete out punishment later.

The students were dissatisfied and cautious; they did not want to get involved with any Party factions. What the intellectuals were offering would obviously help Zhao Ziyang. Yet we saw some hope. The authorities had sent people to talk to us. They were worried about Gorbachev's visit, so it was possible that we could end the hunger strike by the next evening.

On the morning of 15 May at about 5.a.m., I returned to the square from trips to hospitals fetching supplies of salt water. It looked almost deserted. Rubbish lay everywhere. People seemed suddenly to have disappeared. There were only a few hundred spectators left. The broadcasting station was gone. So, too, was the protecting circle of people.

I wondered what had happened. I discovered that most of our people had moved to the east of the monument, about a thousand people lying on the ground. They looked numb. There was no hope in their eyes, only despair. It was very cold. Yet they were firm, awaiting death.

I found Chai Ling. Despairingly, she said we had once more been deceived by the Government. After the student delegates came back from the meeting with Yuan Mingfu and others, the Government announced that due to Gorbachev's visit the next day, the square would be cleared by the police by eight in the morning. The majority of the student delegates had decided to remain on the square, yet Wuer Kaixi asked the hunger strikers to move to the east side of the square as a compromise with the Government. When we moved to the east side, people there thought we would withdraw from the square, and they left too. Nobody was protecting the strikers.

But as the Government had refused all our demands, we couldn't

leave now. More and more people fainted. There were not enough medical people. Would the Government really let us die? I said to Chai Ling that the Government did not care about us. Those of us who had organised the hunger strike were responsible for our fellow students. 'If it's necessary to save the hunger strikers,' I said, 'I'll burn myself to move those bureaucrats who are more interested in their power games than in people.'

We went to the broadcasting station, which was now set up at the east side of the monument. Chai Ling took the microphone and said, 'My name is Chai Ling. I'm a graduate student of the department of psychology at Beijing Normal University. I wrote the manifesto for the hunger strike. I declared we would fight to the end with our lives. I will accept death if necessary, but I will not take defeat lying down.

'The hunger strike has been going on for two days. Many students have fainted. But the Government has shown no sincerity, no compassion. They do not care if students just die like this, one by one. The doctor said three days is the limit. I cannot just wait for so many young lives to disappear. If we are doomed to death, I will be the first one to walk to death. If my life can save all of us here, I will not hesitate to set fire to myself in order to save the rest of us.' At this, everybody cried.

'Now, if we are to be effective,' she continued, 'if we are not to die in vain, we must set up a formal headquarters for the hunger strike, to co-ordinate our efforts and protect ourselves. I offer myself to be the first commander. My qualification is my pledge to achieve our goals and protect you with my life.' People responded with tears and applause.

We had to prepare ourselves for a protracted struggle. We had to arrange picket lines and medical teams. Most important, we had to organise the students. I suggested we set up an association of representatives of all colleges and told each college to elect a representative. In about fifteen minutes each college had done so.

The meeting started. Chai Ling gave an opening speech and the discussion began. But it was the third day of the hunger strike; everyone was tired and weak, and their tempers were frayed. At first everyone denounced the Government for its insincerity and deception. They called those student leaders who told them to withdraw from the square traitors. They were agitated. People interrupted each other, spoke at the same time. Everything was becoming noisy and confused.

I took over a small loudspeaker and tried to chair the meeting, to bring some order to the discussion. People did not know me. They asked me who I was. The former student leaders were especially uncooperative.

Chai Ling introduced me as the deputy commander of the headquarters. She told them I was in charge of the day-to-day business. I was temporarily accepted, though I knew that sooner or later they would realise I was from out of town, and their suspicions would revive.

I set up a series of strict rules for the meeting. Nobody should interrupt the person who was speaking. Speeches should be given in order. Each person was allowed three minutes. The speech should be to the point.

First, I said the most important responsibility of the members of the headquarters was to protect the students. As the present members were not elected, the students could ask them to resign at any time and elect new ones. Second, the headquarters could make resolutions only on behalf of all students, and when possible in consultation with them.

Then I outlined the democratic procedures I advocated. Every vote was equal. Student leaders and other students were equal; the principle behind any resolution was democracy. Resolutions had to be discussed and decided by everybody.

'Now, we have two things to do,' I said. 'One is to know what all the students think of the next step, how we should carry on the dialogue with the Government and what we should raise. We should also make clear how many hunger strikers there are and the condition of their health.

'The other thing is to set up order in our area so as to protect the students' lives. We need to set up a lifeline, a cleared pathway to get hunger strikers to the hospital. It will go across the middle of the square on the north side of the monument, and up both sides of the square to Chang'an Avenue.'

The meeting gradually came to order, and we voted on the various proposals and priorities. The talking went on for perhaps another hour, during which I repeatedly stressed the difference between representing and supplanting – the delegates could only represent the students but not supplant them. It was a beginning of a truly democratic organisation.

After the meeting we returned to the broadcasting station that had become our centre. Chai Ling broadcast the student pledge: 'For the democratisation of our motherland, for the prosperity of our country, I am willing to take part in the hunger strike. I will not stop the hunger strike until our goals are achieved.' She formally announced the setting up of the headquarters.

It was almost impossible for me, an outsider, to be a leader of Beijing students: people did not quite trust outsiders. Yet now was the critical moment, and my cool head and ability to think were needed. Now, it was even more critical that I keep calm.

There were now 1,030 hunger strikers from more than forty universities – 200 more than yesterday. Each college had a space about twenty metres square, with all the hunger strikers in the middle and supporters surrounding them. Outside the area was the picket line. The space was three times as big as before, with room for the strikers to lie down.

At noon, hundreds of thousands of people poured into the square to support us but we kept them outside the lifeline for there were students fainting all the time and being rushed to hospital. The ambulances were ready. The lifeline looked solemn and quiet, an open pathway to the hospital. We would not allow anyone to cross this line.

But when about a thousand teachers from Beijing University arrived, having walked from the university to the square, I told the picket line to let some of them in. Students and teachers hugged each other in tears. Medical workers immediately warned us that the students must not become too excited. Many teachers broadcast their support of the students and the hunger strike. Hope once more was visible on the students' faces. They were comforted that people understood them.

That afternoon we held a press conference. We explained how we had organised the hunger strike and what we demanded. We asked students from the medical school to describe the hunger strikers' health. Already more than eighty students had fainted or fallen into a coma. The faces of many students were swollen, and there were lumps all over their bodies. The swings of temperature between day and night were another stress they had to face: it changed from over 30°C during the day to only a little over 10°C at night. The students had no bedding but a few layers of newspapers.

By the time we held the press conference, the fast had been going on for three days and two nights. The journalists had tears in their eyes when they asked us questions. 'Please stop the hunger strike,' one of them said. He couldn't help crying aloud. Another woman journalist went over to comfort him and she cried. The conference ended.

I was worried about Chai Ling, so I went back to the headquarters. More people were fainting. We hoped the Government would accept our demands and that we could end the hunger strike. The delegation in charge of dialogue with the Government said they would urge the Government to accept our demands, so we needed to redefine them.

The representatives from all colleges met and discussed a few proposals and reports. The most important thing we demanded was that the Government renounce the 26 April editorial, thereby legitimising the student movement. After that, the dialogue could be carried out gradually. I put forward a few proposals for ways in which the Government could recognise the student movement. First, either Zhao Ziyang or Li Peng should come to the square in person and announce to the students that the movement was both patriotic and democratic. Second, the *People's Daily* should carry an article expressing the same idea, thus essentially rescinding the 26 April editorial. Third, the dialogue between the students and the Government should be televised live so that everybody could see the Party and government leaders admit that the student movement was patriotic and democratic in nature. I asked everybody to express their idea by vote. The meeting went smoothly. The representatives returned to their people and the students voted. Over the broadcast station we repeated our proposals.

By this time I had stopped feeling hungry but my head was whirling. Often my mind was just a blank. Practically everyone was half crazy. I was surprised that I could still write down the complicated ideas of our demands in simple words so that everyone could vote.

At about 6 p.m. the head of the dialogue delegation, Xiang Xiaoji, came to get our proposals. I outlined them to him, and he waited to learn the result of the voting. I was still quite confident that we would get a response from the Government.

And then my confidence was shaken.

Four teachers and a student representative from the University of Law and Politics came to see me. They wanted to talk about the strategy of the movement. I was interested. The teachers told me that they had been the students' advisers ever since the movement started. After some hesitation, they asked where I came from. I told

them calmly I was from Nanjing University. They asked me for my ID. I told them that because I couldn't afford the train ticket I hadn't brought any ID with me. The teachers said to me, 'You'd better step down and keep a low profile. We can see you are very capable, but we have doubts about you. We think you'd understand why we suspect you. A person who doesn't have a very clear identity but occupies such an important post in the movement could cause trouble.'

After a while the former leaders of the Independent Students' Union came to see me and asked the same questions. Chai Ling was very angry when she heard this. She told them if they trusted her they should trust me. I said I did not need any ID to prove my identity. My very act of participating in the hunger strike was my identity.

They did not say anything, but I knew they were not convinced. I didn't care. The doctors told me that many students refused to drink the salt water. They drank plain water, which destroyed the delicate salt balance in the body so that all kinds of diseases would start to appear. But they had to drink something. Milk might be a possibility; I knew it had kept Gandhi alive for a long time. Although international conventions on non-violent action permitted salt water for hunger strikers, I didn't know about milk. We had to abide by the conventions if we were to be taken seriously. But I knew it was hard for people to drink salt water, especially when they were hungry. It makes you vomit.

There were now about 1,130 hunger strikers. When their vote was counted, 95 per cent wanted to continue the strike until the Government announced openly that the 26 April editorial was a mistake. I sent the results of the voting with a messenger to the delegation that was then meeting with Government representatives far across the dark square in a distant ministry building. Perhaps the show of near-unanimity would bolster our case with them.

At this time a tall worker with big eyes and heavy eyebrows came over. I had come to know Da Jing during the demonstrations. He was very active and had done a lot to help us. He told me that the day before a group of Beijing residents demonstrated past Tiananmen. Some were true supporters of the student movement, but one of them, he knew, was a criminal who had not finished his gaol sentence. He said that the Government had used a number of criminals to do their dirty work in the past. Now it was likely that they would instruct criminals to pretend to be supporters of the student movement and then to beat up bystanders, thus providing the Government with an excuse to suppress the students.

We heard stories about people trying to break into the Great Hall of the People. We couldn't afford any chaos so I sent people over to try to keep the situation in control, but Da Jing had come back to report a critical situation at the hall. A number of suspicious people shouted that they would smash up the Great Hall of the People. Only about a hundred guards were in front of the hall, but thousands were inside – it seemed that they were just waiting for people to break into the hall.

We were worried. The dialogue was going on. The hunger strikers would be completely defeated if great chaos, or a fire erupted in the square. We were afraid many would die if violence broke out. In the dark it would be hard to tell who had started it. The situation was very critical.

Chai Ling went to the loudspeaker and said to the strikers, 'Those who can stand up please follow us. We want to show to the Government who the real protectors of the Great Hall of the People are, and who the rioters.'

A hundred people stood up and formed a line. Chai Ling, Da Jing, and I led the way across the square where there were now at least 800,000 people to the hall. Everybody was talking loudly; people looked crazy. The square felt like a volcano ready to erupt.

When we got to the hall it was about 10 p.m. and we saw about 60,000 people crowded at the steps trying to break in. Only one line of about fifty soldiers, arm in arm, stood before them. As the crowd pushed forward, they backed up the steps and now stood quite high up them. Some people in the crowd were shouting, 'Come out, you leaders. If you don't come out, we will smash the hall into pieces; we will break in.' Gorbachev and Yang Sangkung were talking inside. We wondered why no more soldiers were sent out to protect the hall. Usually there were thousands guarding it.

Others in the crowd shouted, 'Get out, you students. We must smash the hall.'

Chai Ling and I had reached the highest step, right in front of the soldiers. We tried to tell the people to sit down and stop the attack. Chai Ling fainted. I was scared to death. I stood up and saw a sea of people before us – and we were so few. How could I get Chai Ling out of here and find an ambulance to send her to the doctor? Who could hear us amid such noise? We had no loudspeaker, nothing.

I had to get Chai Ling into the hall and find a doctor for her. I begged the soldiers, 'Please make way for her. She has lost consciousness. She has been fasting for three days. She is in danger.' I was on the point of crying.

But those soldiers stood there mute as if they had heard nothing.

'We've come to protect the hall, to help you. It's three days since the hunger strike started.' I shook one of them with all my strength. 'Didn't you hear? She's dying. We must save her. Are you a human being?'

A soldier said, 'You have to ask the officer. Without orders from above, we can do nothing.'

Two officers in uniform stood with a man in a civilian suit, a few paces behind the soldiers. They wore high leather boots and had walkie-talkies in their hands. They had heard what I said. But their faces were expressionless.

I went on, 'She's the commander of the hunger strikers. Save her and let her speak to the crowd. People will listen to her; people will listen to the hunger strikers. We've come to help and protect you. Otherwise you would long ago have been crushed.' I shouted crazily while the two officers and their commander continued to stand there ignoring me. Then they started pacing back and forth, their heavy boots clicking rhythmically. Every click was a blow to my heart.

Suddenly I became very calm. I looked at the national emblem above the entrance to the hall. I had passed the emblem many times. Every time I passed it, I had felt proud of my republic. It seemed then so magnificent and solemn. But now the emblem looked like the mouth of a wolf to me, a wide-open mouth swallowing human lives. I was rudely awakened. We were risking our lives to protect the country but if we died then and there, some would be glad, and no one there would feel hurt, sympathetic, or shocked.

I turned to look at the crowd again. Everything floated around me in slow motion. My heart turned cold; my calmness frightened me.

Just then Chai Ling came to. She wanted to speak to the crowd to stop them from breaking into the hall. I prevented her. 'We're trying to protect the Great Hall of the People – but who will protect our lives? Our duty is to protect the lives of the hunger strikers. We've made a mistake.'

Chai Ling calmed down too. Students who had come to support us shouted to the crowd, 'Please don't hurt the hunger strikers.' But more and more people were trying to force their way into the hall. The students tried to keep them back, but they were losing ground.

I was utterly calm now. I pointed to the crowds in front of us in the dark, torches blazing, and asked Chai Ling, 'What do you think that looks like?'

'What?'

I said, 'It looks like history.'

'What history?'

'We have moved backward two hundred years. This is Bastille Square. The Bastille Prison is behind us.'

'You mean the French Revolution? How can you think of that at such a time?'

'I can't help it. If I couldn't think like that now, if I couldn't remove myself from the moment, I would kill myself. Every one of us is writing history. We write it so seriously with every stroke. But, after all, each of us has only one pen. The story I'm writing now is to protect you, to help all the hunger strikers get back alive.'

Both of us knew that the situation was more than ominous. What if some of the hunger strikers fainted there? What if some of them died? Could we do as we had pledged? Somehow a miracle happened. Students between the hunger strikers and the pushing crowd stood up and said to the crowd, 'Please stop pushing. The hunger strikers are here.' Gradually, as the word spread back into the crowd, the people stopped pushing even though a few still tried to agitate the crowd. Some shouted, 'The students are fools. The Government is a bunch of bastards.' But more of them shouted, 'Long live the students!'

We told the hunger strikers to help each other up and go back at once. I did not want to delay another second, lest anything happen to them. The crisis was past.

After we left the hall, we heard that the dialogue had ended in failure. The officials would not agree to televise the dialogue and broadcast it live. Their excuse was that there were technical problems that could not be resolved.

I had been prepared for this – but I was shocked at something I was not prepared for. When we got back, I saw some people having a meeting. No members of the headquarters were among them and they were debating heatedly. All the democratic procedures I had set up were being ignored. I went up and asked about the meeting.

We were the target of the meeting. The former student leaders, among others, were trying to seize power from us. I was their main target. They questioned my identity. Chai Ling explained, 'He has been with us since April. He has proved himself to be very brave and firm.' As soon as she finished, they attacked her by saying that she had no ability to be the commander, and nobody had elected her. They wanted to get rid of her. Their aim was to expel her by attacking me, for my lack of ID and for not being a Beijing student.

I asked them who they wanted as commander. They at once produced a list of names, with someone no one had heard of as commander.

'I cannot agree that this is only a movement that concerns people in Beijing,' I said. 'This movement concerns the future of China, the fate of the Chinese people and the political reforms in our country. Any Chinese with conscience can take part in it. You're wrong to say that I have no identity. I am a student from Nanjing University. Anyone who has eyes and a conscience can prove it. Who can prove that I have anything to do with the police, that I am a spy? And is there anyone here who can show the ID that proves that he or she is not a spy?'

They did not know how to respond.

I went on, 'You want to get rid of all the members of the headquarters. That's all right. But the headquarters was set up through democratic procedures. The students agreed to have us as members of the headquarters. Though we weren't elected, they are still quite aware of who we are. If all the hunger strikers think we aren't competent enough and want to elect others, that is, of course, all right. If the list you made up had not been discussed and approved by the joint meeting of all the representatives, it is a piece of waste paper.'

They agreed to have a meeting of the representatives. When the representatives arrived, they thought they had come to hear important news. They kept asking about the results of the dialogue. I told them about it briefly. Then I told them about the attempt to seize power from the present members of the headquarters. They were very angry. The list was immediately rejected, and the insurgents turned their embarrassment into anger, focusing all their attacks on me. My only crime was that I was unable to show my ID and prove I was a student and not a spy. The teachers had raised the same questions. Now that Chai Ling could still be commander, I thought I didn't need to be in the leading group. I said I would think it over and if I decided to back out, I would resign formally.

I left the headquarters tent. I felt deeply grieved, especially after what had happened in front of the Great Hall of the People. The Government had no feelings. And, at this critical moment, some of these students could think only of their own fame and self-interest. If that was true, how could the movement remain healthy? How could we keep the hunger strikers alive? I felt the weight of the responsibility and a deep feeling of disillusionment, loss and despair.

Chai Ling and some representatives came over and said, 'We all want you to come back. Those people have been driven away by the representatives. Please come back.' I was grateful to Chai Ling. She had never suspected me from the very first time we met. I felt less lonely. It would be hard for me to stop helping her but I did not want the work and unity of the headquarters to be disturbed because of me. I knew some people would still hate me and launch another attack.

I said to her,'You go on with your meeting. I may resign. I'll let you know my decision before I leave.' Chai Ling looked at me without saying a word. I could see in her eyes both trust and regret. I went away from the headquarters area and walked among the hunger strikers.

The place was different from before. The guard line was quite clear. People could lie down now but there were not enough quilted coats and blankets. The hunger strikers huddled together and sang the 'Internationale'. In this way they tried to forget the cold night and encourage themselves. They could not get enough sleep and enough things to protect themselves from the cold. In the daytime they were too excited; at night people fainted – two or three hundred every night. A doctor told me we needed to turn each student over several times at night or someone might die in a coma.

As I strode among them, I felt a growing love for the hunger strikers. They were the heart of this student movement, not the would-be leaders who tried to grab power and fame. My responsibility was to the hunger strikers. Their lives were threatened every minute. I pushed aside all my troubling thoughts. Some people suspected me. So what? If I backed out, I would become a criminal of history. I was clear about everything now.

With these thoughts I returned to the meeting. I was welcomed with applause. I told them the doctor's words. I sent them to arrange people to turn over everyone several times during the night, especially the girls and the weaker ones. If a critical case arose, the person should be sent to hospital at once.

I lay down at about three in the morning. Hunger gnawed at me. I felt as if my head was growing bigger and heavier. It was very cold, about 10°C, and I had nothing to cover me. Exhausted, I fell asleep.

May 16 dawned. I had two hours' sleep before someone woke me up at five. I called a meeting of the student representatives to discuss how to control the number of hunger strikers. When we started the hunger strike we had not imagined that the Government would be so inflexible; we had not had a deadline in mind. If the Government continued to ignore that the lives of the students were in danger, we could announce the end of the hunger strike once the last of the strikers had fainted. We would not have won the concessions we sought, though the moral victory would be complete. But if new people continued joining the strike every day, there would be no end. Since the Government plainly didn't care who died, the responsibility shifted to us to prevent needless loss of life. And we needed to keep both disease and stress to a minimum to safeguard the strikers' lives. The fewer people there were, the less the noise and the clearer the air.

The papers were full of news about the student movement. The journalists reported it bravely, without worrying whether they would lose their jobs. They wrote moving articles about the big demonstrations and the hunger strike. The strikers read them and were moved; excitement made them faint. Support in many forms came from all over the country and that excited them, too.

We had to control this if we were to keep them calm. 'More than three hundred students have fainted,' Dr Li told me. 'Today is a crucial time. Usually if a fast lasts over three days, the person fasting will be in danger, and many symptoms will appear. We should keep noise to a minimum.' He had enlisted doctors from more than ten hospitals to check the strikers' health.

I went round and asked the students how long they thought they could persist. They all said, 'We will not stop the hunger strike until we achieve our goals.' One young man was sweating all over, his face swollen so much he couldn't open his eyes. When I asked him how long he could hold out, he opened his mouth a little and whispered, 'Till death.' A teacher beside him told me he had come back from hospital twice.

Many people were like him. My heart was heavy. I was afraid of anyone dying. Those hunger strikers who were sent to the hospital should not be allowed to come back again, otherwise the hunger strike could never end. But the people on the picket line told me it was too difficult to control the entrance. 'Take yesterday,' one of them said. 'We had to let in dozens of students from out of town. Some of them had started their fasts the moment they got on the train. How could we keep them out?'

I went back and drafted an announcement that no more people would be allowed to join the hunger strikers. People who went to hospital were not to come back. I hoped that people from all walks of life would urge the Government to support the students' just demands and show they cared about their lives. Meanwhile, our headquarters would work hard not to let anyone die.

Soon my measures caused difficulties. With Gorbachev in town, more and more journalists, both Chinese and foreign, came into the square. And many others came to show their support. People fought to get into the area.

The square now held over a million people. The sun was scorching. The noise, the air – everything excited and affected the hunger strikers. When the supporters saw their condition, they became even angrier. The strikers were so weak that the moment they stood up, they fainted.

Nightingale ran over to me. She had completely changed. She used to be very fashionable, with neat clothes and careful makeup but now she was dirty, her face was streaked by tears. When I asked her how she was, she told me, 'Yesterday, I started a hunger strike with the students from the University of Politics and Law in front of Xinhuamen. There were dozens of them; now half of them have fainted in the sun. A number of teachers took part as well, some of them in their fifties. They wouldn't listen to me.

'I knelt in front of Xinhuamen for two hours, hoping Li Peng would come out. They simply ignored me. I tried to push my way into Zhongnanhai, but the soldiers pushed me out. Twelve students from the Institute of Performing Arts refused food and water. I am a nurse, and knelt before them, trying to persuade them not to refuse liquid. But they ignored me, too.' She cried and fainted.

I was very worried. People must not stop taking water. I tried to stand up, my head whirling. A few guards came over to support me, and we made our way to Xinhuamen, the entrance to the Zhongnanhai compound just west of the Forbidden City, north-west of the square.

When we got there, I couldn't help crying. The four teachers who had tried to make me give up were among the hunger strikers; they sat there like wooden figures. I could hardly stand, gazing at the others. They lay in a line side by side, looking like mummies. Beside them were big characters: 'Hunger strike, thirst strike.' Behind them hung a pitch-black banner on which a naked mother had been painted, with big characters: 'Save humans.'

As I looked at the scene, I felt dizzy and had to fight desperately to stay on my feet. The doctors came to me and told me that they couldn't go on like that.

I wanted to say something to the hunger strikers, but I couldn't find the words. Finally I said, 'We haven't achieved our goals yet; it's not time for the last sacrifice. If some people's sacrifice is necessary for others' survival, members of the headquarters should die before others.

'We should persist in our struggle. You see how many people have been moved. Our goals will be achieved. We should conserve our energy, and carry on to our final struggle. It is not the time for sacrifice yet.'

'What we're doing is to protest with our lives,' one student said. 'We can't stand the Government any more. We want our descendants to realise there were people in our republic who knew the worth of democracy and freedom. We fight for such simple and basic rights with our lives.'

I raised my head and saw once again the big national emblem. I wanted to say, 'Oh, Republic, please remember the young people who defended you with their lives.' But would our sacrifice bear fruit? Would our voices be heard?

More and more students refused water and I knew the situation was critical. At the headquarters we tried to think of ways to stop this immediately. I hurried back to the square to discuss it with the others.

There, Jai Yong greeted me with the news that about twenty students had arrived from Nankai University in Tianjin to join the hunger strikers yesterday and that *they had* stopped drinking water today.

The students had lost their reason. They could no longer control themselves. I went with Jai Yong to the tent of Nankai University.

There were about twenty people in it wearing mouth masks, some standing, some sitting.

I said, 'What are you doing? You want to protest against the Government? Don't be so foolish. Can't you see that those officials are not human beings? If you go on like this, you're killing yourselves and your own people.' I told them of the strikers at Xinhuamen. 'They will not listen to me. If you refuse water, others will follow suit. But we can't just die like this. We're fighting for the future of China, not for death. And we're not alone now. All the people now support us. They'll find ways to put pressure on the Party and Government.' I talked of victory at hand, of the pledge of the headquarters' people to sacrifice their lives first.

'Now I beg you. Please take off your mouth masks.' I spoke to the student beside me, who seemed to be their leader. 'Please take the lead and take off the mask.' He did. I was stunned: his mouth was sealed with three layers of adhesive tape. All the other students took off their masks. Every mouth was sealed like his. Some had stuffed their mouths with towels. Some had tied their own hands. I could control myself no longer. I cried and cried. Jai Yong and the doctors and everyone there cried. Gradually I felt my heart contract; my limbs went numb and my mind blank.

When I came to, I was in the headquarters tent, and the leader of the Nankai group was by my side. He had taken the adhesive tapes off. He said to me, 'We all understand you. Now all the students of Nankai University are members of the headquarters. We'll do whatever you tell us to do. We'll fight for victory.' He shook my hand and left.

Then Jai Yong took my hand in his and said, 'I didn't know you before. I suspected you too. But today I saw your identity. I know who you are.'

As I was resting, someone told me a man had been waiting to see me for some time. I went out of the tent. The man seemed very secretive. He told me that Zhao Ziyang had stood for hours at the top of Tiananmen (Tianan Gate) with his binoculars, watching the crowd trying to break into the Great Hall of the People.

Zhao Ziyang, it seemed, was playing games. He wanted to make use of the student movement to beat down his rival, Li Peng. Zhao had no intention of solving the problem of the student movement. Yesterday, he said, Li Peng had hired a bunch of hooligans to try to break into the Great Hall of the People. You students, he concluded, should announce that you will immolate yourselves, even if it is just a gesture.

I thought of the scene in front of the Great Hall of the People, the students in front of Xinhuamen, those politicians making use of the young students for their own corrupt interest. Furious, I yelled, 'You get out of here. The hunger strike is not a tool for politicians. The students are showing that they do this for the country. You talk about burning. Why don't you go and do it yourself, right this minute? I'll arrange for you to speak through the loudspeaker. I won't let one student burn himself if I'm still alive. You come with me.' When some students, curious at my fury, came over, the secretive man ran away.

News came that the negotiations seemed to be going well and a solution might be found today. It was said Zhao Ziyang was coming to the square. At six, though, the news came that only Yuan Mingfu would come.

Perhaps half a million people were now in the square. Wang Dan accompanied Yuan to see the students. When people heard that Yuan Mingfu was coming, they were frantic. Chaos broke out. People tried to squeeze forward. The hunger strikers hoped their struggle was near its end. At the microphone, Wang Dan said, 'I guarantee with my own personal character that Yuan Mingfu is a true communist, an upright communist, and a very good person. Please listen to him.'

Yuan took over the microphone and started to talk. I was close by. He was trembling all over. He said, 'I understand completely your demands. I sympathise with you. In my opinion, your movement is a patriotic and democratic movement. But I'm a communist. I can't go against the principles of the Party even when the Party's view and mine are not the same. I've reported your demands and conditions to the top leaders. I hope you'll give them time to consider them.

'I personally guarantee that we won't punish any participant in the student movement and we won't take revenge on you. If you don't trust me, I will go with you after you end the hunger strike to your university. I am willing to be your hostage. Now, though, you must stop the strike and go to hospital for treatment. You are young; you've no right to damage yourselves. You're the future of our motherland. We're old. China relies on you to build it.'

He was clearly sincere. We felt at last we were understood. People also asked him repeatedly whether the top leaders would accept our demands and whether he was speaking on behalf of the central Party committee. He stressed that things would be resolved step by step. He only represented himself but he hoped students would give the top leaders time to think. The most important thing was to end the hunger strike.

Then Wuer Kaixi spoke. He was very weak, and was hooked up to an oxygen bottle. He said, 'I can understand Minister Yuan. I trust him as a true communist. I hope you will stop the hunger strike.'

Some people applauded, but more people shouted, 'How about our demands?' 'Don't let him go.' Kaixi fainted. An ambulance came to take him to hospital, and Yuan left with him.

The square was again in chaos. I tried hard to get people to open the lifeline again for the hunger strikers and soon some semblance of order returned. We called a meeting to discuss whether we should accept Yuan's proposal.

Within a minute or two, all the student representatives had assembled. Some said we should end the hunger strike. Others said nothing was over yet; we should not let ourselves be deceived. Some thought we should have kept Yuan as hostage and made him experience the hunger strike. The doctors said, 'You have to stop the hunger strike. Your lives are in great danger.' But outside, meanwhile, people shouted to us, 'Don't be taken in by the Government. If Yuan is out of favour, his words will mean nothing!'

'If half of the strikers think we should accept Yuan Mingfu's conditions and leave the square, we'll do it,' I said. 'Otherwise we'll continue the strike. The democratic procedures will not change.'

People calmed down and started to speak. Only a few students insisted on withdrawing from the square.

I expressed my views last. 'I don't quite trust the Government, based on what they have done in the past few weeks. But I am concerned for our lives. We don't want any deaths. Please tell every student we still have a long way to go. Please also tell them that the headquarters will stand with them, whatever they decide.'

Soon the results came back from every college: about 90 per cent felt we should not end the hunger strike or withdraw from the square. Chai Ling announced that the majority of the students did not accept Yuan Mingfu's proposal.

But this was the first time any government official had shown any sincerity. I feared there was little reason left in the students. Their health was worsening; the Government had waited too long to respond, and it was hard for them to accept such a few words from Yuan. So much support had come from all directions in the past few days that the students thought they would win. The spirit of self-sacrifice also strengthened their determination.

At night an open letter was broadcast from the presidents of ten universities. They appealed to the top leaders to accept the students' demands and also asked the students to end the hunger strike as soon as possible.

On 17 May a spectacular demonstration took place. The whole of Beijing came out to support the students – workers, teachers, intellectuals, writers, government clerks, and even some middle-level bureaucrats. The demonstrators marched around the square, around the hunger strikers.

People thought Deng Xiaoping was the biggest obstacle. He was, after all, eighty-five years old. One old man prevented China from advancing. Many slogans were directed against both Deng Xiaoping and Li Peng. Yan Jiaqi and other scholars called Deng the last emperor. They called on people to rise up against the emperor and overthrow the imperial system.

Many students felt their suffering had not been in vain, since it had aroused such a response from the people. They were confident China would march on a prosperous road. But this scent of victory only made our work of maintaining the physical condition of the hunger strikers that much harder. We tried to keep them calm and the lifeline open but nearly a thousand people fainted that day.

Our picket line stopped working. More people, especially students from out of town, joined the hunger strikers. Sixty teachers wanted to join, too. Clearly we were still gathering momentum.

On the morning of 17 May, Zhao Ziyang issued a statement that was broadcast on the morning news, saying vaguely that the students' patriotic enthusiasm should be recognised and that the Government would not punish the students. But he avoided saying that the student movement was democratic and patriotic. But the statement was significant, though this was lost on the students at the time and only became clearer much later. It was the last chance to stand with Zhao, which might have saved him and might have protected the movement. But the signal was not clear, and the students mistrusted Zhao and involvement with Party politics.

We called a meeting, but by then it was impossible for the students to talk reasonably. So we ended up with the same two demands.

After that meeting, I knew my plan to end the hunger strike after everyone had been sent to hospital could hardly be realised. Those sent to hospital came back as soon as they'd received some treatment and felt a little better; some had been taken to the hospital four or five times. People were still joining the hunger strike.

Various schools had put up flimsy plastic tents. A weather forecast predicted driving rains the next morning. That evening some medical students came to see me. They said that a drizzling rain would spread microbes at an alarming rate. The scorching sun killed bacteria so thus far disease had been moderate. But they said that if we could not prevent the bacteria from spreading before the pouring rain came, an epidemic was likely. I was terribly worried. The tents were meant only to protect people from the scorching sun, not rain. The doctors said that if the students were exposed to the rain, some might die.

Jai Yong arranged for buses to arrive at 4 a.m. at the north end of the square. They would provide the shelter we needed. We had to count the number of hunger strikers to know how many buses to get. Three thousand six hundred people were fasting in the square: we would need seventy or eighty buses.

Meanwhile I set up a group for the prevention of plague. One person kept in constant contact with the weather station. Another went to the public health station to arrange for the area to be sterilised. We also persuaded the city to provide brooms and dustpans, and sent people to clean the square, plot by plot. As soon as a plot was cleaned, we moved the hunger strikers there. It was difficult to move them, since they were very weak and would faint as soon as they tried to stand up.

At 5 a.m., just an hour behind schedule, more than seventy buses arrived. The rain had started. I was in charge of moving the students. The hunger strikers moved very slowly; they had little strength left after six days of fasting. Everyone was exhausted – I felt as if I was floating in air. I had only one idea in mind: to do everything to prevent an epidemic. The prevention work must be finished in time.

Cheng Zhen, another member of the headquarters, came to tell Chai Ling that dialogue was again possible, this time with officials of much higher rank – maybe even Li Peng or Zhao Ziyang would meet with the students. They had heard the news from Yuan Mingfu. Nothing was said about televising it live or negating the 26 April editorial. Chai Ling asked me for advice. I said I wasn't very interested in the meeting. I couldn't go anyway, as I had to take care of the cleaning work. Chai Ling said she too had little interest in the meeting. I no longer thought of dialogue.

As it was getting light on the morning of 18 May, a middle-aged intellectual who said he was an associate professor of political sciences, came to talk to us about the significance and strategy of the student movement. It was all empty talk. I didn't want to hear it but I could not move a step, nor say a word. I felt all my strength gone. Everything turned black; I heard a loud roar of thunder. My last vision was of people moving slowly on the square. My last thought was, 'We're finished. History will call me a criminal. Disease is coming.'

When I opened my eyes, I was lying on a mattress. I looked around. There were about a dozen of us in a big hall. Everyone had intravenous tubes dripping saline solution into their arms. Nurses were walking around softly. I suddenly remembered. I tried to sit up and look outside the window. The rain was pouring. I fell back on the bed. So the rains had come at last. We were finished. I wanted to die.

At this moment a nurse patted me and said, 'Open your eyes and look.' Reluctantly, I opened my eyes. 'Good. You're awake at last. You've been sleeping for seven or eight hours. We've given you five bottles of intravenous drip,' she told me.

I murmured, 'Everything's finished. Disease will kill people.'

'What were you saying?' she asked. 'What's the matter with you? Are you delirious?'

I looked out of the window. My mind was clearer. I asked her, 'Has anyone died?'

She thought a while and said, 'No. Up till now all those who fainted have been saved.'

'But still the epidemics will arrive and everybody will be finished.'

'What are you talking about?'

'Nothing.'

She shook her head and asked, 'How do you feel? Do you feel any pain?'

'No,' I said, 'I'm all right. How long has it been raining?'

'Let's see. It didn't start to rain until the afternoon.'

I tried to sit up when I heard this. 'What?'

She looked at her watch. 'It's been raining for two hours. Now it's about three. It didn't really begin to rain until one. Before that it was just dark clouds and a bit of thunder, not much rain.'

I exclaimed, 'That's wonderful,' and promptly fell asleep.

When I woke up again, it was an hour or two later. A few doctors stood by my bed. They felt my pulse and listened to my heart. I felt much, much better. Now all my confidence came back. I sat up and tried to pull out the intravenous needle. The doctors thought I was out of my mind. They surrounded me and tried to calm me. I told them briefly what had happened and that I was the deputy commander. My duty station was in Tiananmen Square. I had to go back right away. They said I could not go back. They had to check me and see if I had contracted any disease. I told them I had to go.

'In that case, you'll have to drink all the saline solution that's here for you.' I did so despite the bitter taste.

An old nurse said, 'If you're the deputy commander, please come and tell the students to start eating. If they fast for more than seven days, all the available nutrients will be used up and the body will start cannibalising itself for protein. They'll get some sort of permanent tissue damage. You should feel responsible for them.'

'Didn't they eat something after they came to the hospital?'

'No, they didn't eat anything. They're waiting to go back to the square and continue their fasting.'

I went with the nurse to the other wards. On every bedside table there was some porridge, a bun and some pickles. Nobody had touched their food. I told them I was the deputy commander and gave them a brief account of the situation in the square. I said, 'If you go back, it'll mean great damage to the hunger strikers who are there. Our plan is to announce the end of the hunger strike when everybody has fainted and been brought to hospital. You have already achieved your goal. If you eat something now and go back to support the remaining strikers, you will have saved their lives.'

Some of them started to eat. A nurse came and said two people in another room still refused to eat anything. When I went there, I saw one of them was very stout and looked like a teacher; the other was younger. They were discussing democracy. The older one was a graduate student from the Academy of Social Sciences. I told him about the situation in the square and asked him to eat.

'I can't,' he said, crying. 'Among the hunger strikers are graduate students who are married, with parents and wives and children to take care of. Some of them are over forty. If they are still fasting, how can I eat?'

The others in the room shamefacedly put down their chopsticks. I had to persuade them to go on eating. 'I'm proud of the students, all of them. I see the future of China in them. Anyway, we've moved the people. Many have stood up to fight for their own rights. They've realised that they have to be their own masters. And to fight for the prosperity of the country, you have to protect yourselves. You are now in hospital – you've done enough fasting. Please do not go back as hunger strikers. You can go back and take part in other activities. Please eat something.'

The nurse said there was another student leader here named Jai Yong. I went to see him at once. He opened his eyes and said, 'Don't worry, Li Lu. Everything's been taken care of. The students have been moved to the buses. We have prevented an epidemic breaking out.' I held his hands tight while I listened, grateful for his news and his work. 'Many people fainted, including the guards. Chai Ling also fainted.'

My heart contracted when I heard that. 'Where is she?' He told me the name of the hospital she was sent to, and then lost consciousness again.

The little nurse brought me back to my ward. She introduced me to an old doctor with white hair. He was Dr Hou, the head doctor. 'You're the deputy commander?' He took my hand and said, 'I am grateful to you. I've learned so much from you.' Tears welled up in his eyes. 'Thank you. I've been a doctor for many, many years. Humanism has always been my principle. But now what you've done has made me understand much better what humanism means.'

'And you doctors have taught us,' I said. 'If it weren't for you, we could never have persisted for so long. You work day and night.'

Dr Hou said that we must take care of ourselves. 'If you keep yourselves in good health, there's hope for our motherland. If it weren't for this movement, I would be totally depressed. You've given me hope for the country. The students are trying to save it; we do our best to save the students.'

We grasped each other's hands. He brought over a bowl of porridge. 'You have to eat this. I know you have to go back. I won't stop you. You go back and protect those in the square. Nobody should die. It's time to stop the hunger strike. The Party leaders are not human beings; you can't wait for them. You are our future.

'You must stay alive. I know the international conventions for hunger strikes. Liquids are not forbidden. Please drink this porridge.'

I looked at the porridge. It was thin, and I ate half of it. 'Now I have to go,' I said. 'People are waiting for me. Thank you, Dr Hou.'

I was worried about Chai Ling. When I went into her room, she opened her eyes. She was still the same – the dark and dirty face, scruffy hair, loose shirt, jeans. She still had on the same dirty shoes while sleeping on the white sheet.

She gave me a smile. Many people and doctors came; some asked for her autograph. The doctors asked Chai Ling, too, to try to persuade the students to take some porridge.

The doctors noticed that I was limping and asked me what was the matter. I remembered that yesterday I had stepped on a nail, but had not had time to take care of it. Now it hurt.

The head doctor wanted to tend my foot himself. His hair was white, and I felt embarrassed to have him treat my foot. I said, 'No, no. I can't let you see my foot. It's so dirty, and it smells.'

Chai Ling laughed. 'I've never seen him so embarrassed,' she said. Everyone in the room laughed, and there wasn't much I could do but submit.

Chai Ling and I discussed the situation. Both of us were sure the Government would act shamelessly to the end. We must protect the tudents' lives. We should try to find a suitable opportunity to persuade them to stop the hunger strike. But we knew it would be very hard. I would go back to the headquarters first. The doctor wanted Chai Ling to finish the bottle of intravenous drip before she eft the hospital. He said, 'If you don't listen, I'll kneel down to beg ou to finish it before you go.'

Back in the square, everything was different. The hunger strikers were in more than eighty buses, drawn up along the north side of the quare. One bus had 'Headquarters Bus' painted on its side and eight big loudspeakers on top, facing in all directions.

While Chai Ling and I were in the hospital, another dialogue had aken place. Li Peng had said that the students must leave the square, and didn't refer to demands. The Government was not going to ccept them. It seemed hopeless.

News came that the police were planning a trick. They would send a doctor and some other people on to each bus through the Red

Cross. At night, when the students were asleep, they would drive the buses to the prison, and force-feed them to end the hunger strike. We held a meeting in which we decided we would let the doctors on to the buses, as we needed their help. But we had to be prepared to deal with any trickery. The solution was elegantly simple: a worker let out the air in the tyres of the buses on the outer circle.

On 19 May, in the early morning, someone knocked on the door of our bus and told us that Zhao Ziyang and Li Peng were in the square. He would get more details. After a while he came back with the news that the two had come to the buses at the edge of the circle, where the hunger strikers were. Zhao got on to a bus of students from the Beijing Normal University; and Li Peng got on to a bus of students from the Institute of Physical Education.

One student had written a report of Zhao's comments on toilet paper. 'We came too late,' Zhao had said. 'We're very sorry. You've been on hunger strike for seven days. Do you still want to go on? We don't want you to do so. It'll damage your health and threaten your lives. You must stop the hunger strike at once. Things are complicated. We'll try to solve problems. You are still young, and the future of China belongs to you. We're old. We don't matter any more. It's hard to control the situation in Beijing. You must stop the hunger strike. You must live for the country.' Then even he had cried.

When we heard this report, Zhao's speech sounded like that of an ordinary old man, not a leader. We were confused – was Zhao one of the leaders still, or had he fallen from power?

At 4 or 5 p.m. that day, someone came to the headquarters and left us a document signed by people from Zhao Ziyang's think tanks – the National Committee of Economic Reform, the Economic Reform Institution, the Centre for the Development of Agriculture of the State Council, the China Trust Company, the Research Institution of National Affairs, the Youth Society for Research on the Economic System. The statement had six points:

(1) This student movement was a magnificent movement of patriotism and democracy.
(2) The present serious situation was caused by the mistakes of the Party and the Government.
(3) Since 1949 the top leaders had never been so isolated from the

masses of people. Concerned only with power struggles, they had not responded to the students' demands in time.

(4) If the leaders used military force, the Chinese people, who had experienced the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, would not accept their plot to split the nation and bring China into darkness.

(5) There should be a special session of the National People's Congress as well as a special meeting of the Party Congress to sum up the developments of the past few months. The students should end the hunger strike and prepare for a protracted struggle.

(6) Our country is a People's country. The army is the People's army. Nobody could stop the trend of history. Long live the People. Long live the students.

Why were they coming to us with this show of support? Normally, they would stay within the Party channels, but now it seemed that they needed our support as much as we theirs. They must have already lost the power struggle within the hierarchy and were indicating to us that the army was already involved.

That evening, the situation had become more tense than ever. We held a secret emergency meeting in the headquarters bus. We first gave people all the latest information – the independent unions, the statement from the think tanks, the rumours of a coming military involvement. After heated discussion we came to a decision. We would move the hunger strikers out of the buses along the north edge of the square – where the army, which would almost certainly come in along broad Chang'an Avenue, could easily cut them off from any support – and set up an area for them between the buses and the monument. There we would surround the weakened strikers with healthy people to protect them, and the buses could serve as a protective barricade. I was appointed to arrange the move.

Those in the square did not know what was happening but were growing apprehensive. Rumours were flying around, increasing the tension.

We kept the shades drawn on the headquarters bus for safety. Now it was clear that the army would be involved; we realised that where we were, we would make excellent targets for a sniper on the Tiananmen or any of the flanking buildings. The least we could do was mask the target.

When I used the loudspeakers on the bus to announce the move, the tension erupted into chaos. People banged on the door of the bus, demanding explanations, I had one window unshaded to observe the situation outside and directed the transfer to the special area in a slow, calm, steady voice.

I might have sounded calm, but I was extremely worried. The army might arrive at any moment. The hunger strikers looked like defeated soldiers being evacuated after a battle. They had lost their fervour and were listless and desperate. Some were being carried on stretchers.

It took us about an hour to finish the job. The buses formed a barrier on the north and over a hundred thousand people formed a protective circle around the strikers.

We prepared ourselves mentally. Our principle was that we would not swear back if we were sworn at and we would not hit back if we were hit. Ours was a movement of peace, reason and non-violence. People in poor health, women, and children should leave the square at once. Students were asked to protect the journalists. Journalists should contact the students if anything happened. Above all, the hunger strikers must be protected. The worst thing would be for them to get mixed up with the others. In any disorder their lives would be threatened.

We had arranged to have our next meeting in one of the now-empty buses. On my way to the meeting, I was amazed to see my girlfriend Zhao Ming. I asked her how she got there.

'I waited for you to come back to Nanjing, but you didn't,' she said. 'And there was no letter, no news. I was worried, so I came here to find you.'

'Have you just arrived?'

'No, I've been here for a few days, but I couldn't find you. And here you are.'

I was pleased to see Zhao Ming – but not here, in the centre of everything. To me she meant simplicity and peace and pleasure, and here was complexity and danger and rumours of war. I told her it was too dangerous for her to stay here; something might happen at any moment. We didn't have time to say much.

At the meeting, only Chai Ling, Zhang Boli and I attended from headquarters, meeting with representatives of the college groups. The changed mood in the square was evident. We had to decide on the next step. We were well into the seventh day of the hunger strike. By now, the physical condition of the strikers was critical. 'Yet we can't fully control the growing numbers,' I said. 'The strike has become the end in itself, not a means. The student movement is faced with danger; there has been a big change in the top leadership. We need to eat to get our energy back to deal with this dangerous situation.'

When we voted on the question of continuing the strike, 80 per cent of the representatives voted to end the fasting. We would change the strike to a sit-in and would wait to see how the situation developed before we decided what to do next.

At 9.30 p.m., Chai Ling announced the end of the hunger strike. We asked the people of Beijing to get food to the square for the students, and we asked the students to follow the doctors' instructions and not to eat too much at the beginning. We told the weakest to leave the square and go to hospital.

People were astonished by the news. They could not understand why we should stop the hunger strike before the Government had accepted any of our demands. Some thought that if we persisted, Li Peng would be driven from his post. People surrounded us and asked who had made the decision.

Feng Congde was hysterical. He said the students were accusing us of having sold out to the Government, just as victory was around the corner. He grabbed the microphone and wanted to announce that the previous resolution was invalid. 'How could you have made the decision without me?' he asked.

'You weren't there,' I said. 'We couldn't find you anywhere.'

Chai Ling went over to snatch the microphone from her husband's hand. They started to fight and I went over to pull them apart. Feng Congde was almost crazy from exhaustion and dehydration; he had never fainted and had not therefore had the period of forced rest and rehydration that most of the rest of us had had. I told him again and again that we had voted. He wanted to see the ballots. I told him we didn't have any, as we had voted by hand. He said he had just come back from the hunger strikers, and none of them agreed to end the strike. He was going to call another vote.

When I went back to the bus, Chai Ling was crying bitterly. Zhang Boli sat there feeling helpless. I didn't feel much better. At that moment a man came over to us and asked whether we still planned to end the hunger strike. I said we did. He said he headed the picket line for the headquarters and had under him a group of students who were very good at martial arts. If we agreed, he would solve our problem by forcibly sending Feng Congde to the hospital, since he was obviousy sick and raving. Both Chai Ling and I thought this was

going too far but she said we should do it if it was necessary. Fortunately it wasn't because while he was holding his meeting, he collapsed and was quickly taken to hospital.

By 11.30 p.m., the crowd in the square was relatively quiet. People had accepted the decision to call off the hunger strike, but the crowd stayed, two or three hundred thousand people wanting to know what the next step would be.

That was when we heard the speeches by Li Peng and Yang Sangkung, broadcast from the Great Hall of the People over the powerful official loudspeakers in Tiananmen Square. 'A riot is going on at present,' they said. 'We have to move the army into the city and restore order. We must stop the riot firmly and fast. Martial law will start tomorrow morning at ten o'clock.'

The crowd went berserk. People ran back and forth, waving their fists and shouting, 'Down with Li Peng!' Some were crying, heartbroken, despairing. Others were defiantly singing the 'Internationale'. No one knew what to do.

What did they want? We had never rioted; the hunger strike had been called off. Lao Zi told us that journalists at the Central Radio Station and the newspapers had tried in every way to publicise our announcement of ending the hunger strike. The Central Party committee had ignored that and imposed martial law.

Chai Ling was crying. I said to several of the gathered journalists, 'The hunger strike of four thousand people that lasted seven days was unprecedented in Chinese history and shook the world. We have proved with our hearts that we are for democracy and for the future of our country. We have maintained peace, reason and non-violence from beginning to end.

'But the Government has always ignored the students' demands. Now they have called for martial law, to use the cruellest means to suppress students who have no weapons in their hands. If there is bloodshed, we hope all of you will be witnesses for the students, for history. We hope you will all protect the students whose lives are in danger, and protect this patriotic and democratic movement. Together we must safeguard the basic right of the people to be the masters of their own country.'

We returned to our bus. The students were frantic. Many of them wanted to resume the hunger strike, to show their defiance to the Government.

We drove the bus round the square but it was very hard to move in the crowd. Everywhere we went, we were surrounded by crowds of people shouting slogans: 'Long live the students!' 'The student movement will live for ever!' 'Overthrow Li Peng!' Everyone seemed to be either crying in despair or raging with anger.

We stopped and held a press conference. Every member of the headquarters accused the Li Peng administration of attacking the student movement, and called on the people to protect the students and the fruits of the struggle. People wanted to go on strike – in the factories, in government offices, in stores, in all the work units.

I felt proud of my generation. I understood when Zhang Boli shouted that we would launch a hunger strike of 200,000 people. I believed that no matter how frantic we were, we would still persist in peace and reason.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Martial Law

Once Li Peng declared martial law on 20 May, the movement entered a new, frightening phase. When we started the hunger strike, we were filled with idealism and hopes for democracy and the future. A strong love of the motherland dominated the students' actions and their slogans – 'I starve for my mother' was one. And we identified the motherland with the Government. When the Government ignored us, some forgave it, saying that a mother could misunderstand or even beat her children. But this mother kept on beating us, kept on misunderstanding us.

All night after martial law was announced, Tiananmen Square remained a surging sea of people. Students marched into the square from all directions. A parade of three hundred motorcycles, organised by owners of small private enterprises, patrolled around the square. Trucks carrying workers paraded along Chang'an Avenue. Reports came that army units were entering the suburbs of the city. Everyone was discussing the situation, trying to understand it. Chants of 'Long live the people!' echoed through the square. At daybreak, when reports came that the army units had been blocked in the suburbs, I fell asleep on the seat of the bus.

At about 8 a.m., the writers Lao Zi and Lao Yu woke me up. They said that neighbourhood blockades were indeed keeping the army units from entering the city proper but that once they were intent on entering, they would go ahead. We must tell people the true situation: the square was in crisis; Beijing was in crisis; the country was in crisis. The student movement would be strangled. Now that martial law had been declared in Beijing, it would be declared in all the cities of China. If the banner fell in Beijing, it would fall everywhere.

I told Lao Yi to draft a document, which we would take to all the streets and lanes of the city to tell the people what the situation was.

At this time Feng Congde came back. He looked pale and weak. I was happy to see him back. He was the best organiser among us; without him, we would have neither a broadcast station nor a functioning headquarters. Throughout the hunger strike, he had worked day and night without let-up, and it was understandable that he had finally cracked. We were both apologetic about what had happened, and now we hugged each other and everything was understood, everything forgiven.

Once Lao Yi's statement was ready, we drove along Chang'an Avenue in the headquarters bus with its speakers on top. The broad avenue was filled with people, some marching with the bus, many standing in talkative knots, more streaming towards Tiananmen Square. The announcer read the declaration, managing to make it sound like the professional radio station of a new government.

'Compatriots, our dear Chinese people,' he intoned, 'a severe counter-revolutionary coup is now going on, initiated by Li Peng and Yang Sangkung. They have rounded up more than a hundred thousand soldiers to suppress the students, who have petitioned peacefully and have no weapons. People who fight for freedom and democracy, reformers in the Party, you must realise that a counter-revolution is now threatening to plunge the country into a new dark age.

'China's fate is in our hands. Let's go out into the streets and stop the army units. Let's defend the square, defend the democratic movement, and defend the People's Republic to the last drop of our blood. We call for a special session of the National People's Congress to overthrow Li Peng and Yang Sangkung. Long live the people! Long live the people's democratic movement!'

Four army helicopters droned overhead, monitoring the demonstration. Over the loudspeakers, Chai Ling called on the people to persist in non-violence. The best way to keep the helicopters at a distance was to send up doves and kites. About 300,000 people from all over the country were in the square. The Independent Workers' Union had called a general strike in Beijing and thousands of workers streamed to the square.

Suddenly I felt unutterably calm. I felt the greatness of the square

and of the Chinese people. I was one of those 300,000 people. During the hunger strike we were actually in the centre, the real leadership of the whole country. Now the hunger strike had ended and we were only a part of this sea of people. Now, no organisation could control the square. There was no leadership. Things had evolved so swiftly; the student movement had become a people's movement.

I reviewed what had happened in the past few weeks, and started to think what we should do next. Before 15 May I could still think, had been able keep a clear head. At the same time I had felt helpless. We students had really done our very best but we still could not win. I had never before used all my strength to do anything. But in this movement, I did just that and still felt helpless. It was as though we were in a small boat, floating on the roaring waves of history, which we few young people were trying to steer to the peaceful land.

I decided to seek out Yu Jiang. In times of crisis, intellectuals like him should, I felt, step forward and lead. He and I agreed that the majority of the people in Beijing were on our side, that we should not back down, but should talk to the soldiers and win them over, too. Special congress sessions should be held to discuss how to save the country. But he had nothing to say about firm measures to carry out these objectives.

I asked him to come and lead the movement. He said it was impossible, as if the idea were obviously irrational. He seemed a typical intellectual who talked well but avoided action. Apparently we still had to rely on the students to lead the movement. But though he was unwilling to be active, Yu Jiang was generous in his aid. As I left, he gave me a doctor's white coat and told me, 'You must know how to protect yourselves, especially you student leaders. When danger comes, plunge into the crowd, disappear, and move underground.' And he offered his place in the far west in mountainous Yunnan province as a refuge for any student leader who needed to hide.

After I returned to the square around noon, we discussed our next moves. Since martial law had started at ten this morning, we knew the army might enter at any time. We thought they might use tear gas and electric batons to drive away the students. The activists would be put in prison; the army would occupy Beijing. We bought surgical masks and towels in case of tear gas, but we couldn't prepare for electric batons and prison.

We knew that we student leaders would be the first target. I gave

Chai Ling the doctor's coat Yu Jiang had given me and told her to stay at the edge of our circle and run into the crowd if anything happened. We arranged for two guards to protect her. If there was an emergency, Feng Congde, Zhang Boli and I would remain to organise a withdrawal from the square. We should still remain peaceful – no swearing back if we were sworn at, no hitting back if we were hit.

In the evening more workers and people came to the square to protect the students. They reported that almost half a million others were barricading the outlying streets, preventing the soldiers from entering the city.

I didn't sleep at all that night. It was impossible not to think of what would happen under martial law. I tried to think of a way to avoid repeating the tragedy of so many previous student movements. I also thought of the underground struggles that might follow. The night seemed endless.

At 5 a.m., as the rising sun came into sight, I started to broadcast. 'My fellow students, a new day has started, and the sun has risen. We have won.' On the morning of 21 May, people had successfully stopped the army from coming into the city. Most people were jubilant and thought we would win in the end.

But in the headquarters the mood was different. The situation, we knew, was critical. Reports said that the army's inability to enter the city had infuriated Li Peng, Yang Sangkung and the other old officials. If the army could not enter the city, those at the top would lose face, and a coup against them would be possible. To show that they were in firm control, they ordered the army to be in the square by 1 a.m. on 22 May. Less than a day away.

When tanks appeared to the west of the city, fears increased. Helicopters circled in the air; several hundred more were reported nearby. Civilian planes stopped flying. We heard that a division of soldiers had already entered the Forbidden City, the Museum of History, and the Great Hall of the People through the guarded underground passageways. All public transport closed, and the underground and trains were used for moving army units. Over 3,500 soldiers had already gathered in the railway station close to Tiananmen Square, ready to come into the square that night.

At noon two strangers introduced themselves to us as a professor at the air force school and a former paratrooper. Both had taken part in the suppression of the Tiananmen Incident in 1976 but now they stood on the side of the students. They told us how the square had been cleared that time. A big network of tunnels led in all directions from the centre of the city and the leaders of the Central Party committee could go in and out at will. Before the 1976 incident, army units had used the tunnel to take positions in and around the square. At midnight they stormed the square, hitting people with electric batons, driving them out in five or six minutes. Hundreds were wounded and many killed.

Now, many of the same army units were again in place around the square. Many soldiers were in plain clothes and mixing with the students. The authorities could not repeat what they did in 1976 because so many people were protecting the students. This time they had to surround all the districts of Beijing, form four lines into the city and eventually occupy the square. As long as demonstrations spread throughout the country, the authorities didn't want to spill any blood so would use aeroplanes to drop tear gas to weaken and disperse the crowds.

After we invited these two men to be our military advisers, they asked us to provide 300 scouts continually to gather information. They suggested putting all the loudspeakers together so that we would have the power to muster the thousands of pickets in the square. And they urged us to prepare hundreds of doves and kites to interfere with the paratroopers and planes.

We asked them to talk to the people in the square, to tell them how to deal with all kinds of attacks. Soon, however, students came to the headquarters to say that they made everything sound so terrible; their language was so warlike. After discussing this, we decided to stop using them; we hadn't come to fight a war.

Our principles of peace, reason, and non-violence remained. We would not fight, but we must be prepared. We decided on a few basic measures: if the army units appeared, we should try to co-operate with them and not hit back. We would shout, 'The People's Army loves the people' and 'The people love the People's Army'; the duty of the pickets was to protect the girls, weak people and hunger strikers from any frontal attack. They should help people withdraw from the square when the soldiers arrived; the hunger strikers should immediately get into the buses. They should take no part in anything that happened in the square. Members of the headquarters would negotiate with the army units to have the hunger strikers taken away from the square; we should be on the alert and form a tightly linked network ready to drive away plain-clothes infiltrators. Finally, everyone must have a surgical mask and towel, soaked, to withstand gas attacks.

With this plan in place, people began to calm down. We maintained that we were peaceful demonstrators and would use peaceful means to prevent the military from entering the square.

That afternoon we walked around to see how things were. I heard a quarrel nearby and went over to investigate. A group of Beijing residents had gone on hunger strike on 14 May. On 15 May they had joined the army of student hunger strikers and wanted to move into the buses, too. But the students on the bus were on guard against any strangers.

Everyone had heard the rumours that at least a division of plain-clothes soldiers had infiltrated the square so the students were suspicious of strangers. The Beijing hunger strikers could not prove whether they were genuine. When I talked to their leader, though, I immediately trusted them and allowed the Beijing residents to join the students on the bus. The residents knew that if the movement was suppressed, the students would get off more lightly than workers, residents and intellectuals but now they and the students were one.

In the late afternoon we discussed preparations for a complete defeat of the movement in the square. If that happened, there would be a period of great terror. Arrests and killings would take place. We would have to organise more strikes and soon go underground. We set up our code names, passwords, and liaison places. We would run first to an area within 100 kilometres of Beijing, and then further the next day. We should see how things went before setting up permanent headquarters, probably in the south of China, around Guangzhou (Canton).

We also planned the underground work, to be financed by donations we were now receiving. Every member of the headquarters would be given a certain amount of money for living expenses and costs to carry out underground work.

After the meeting we were silent. I was relieved: the hunger strike was over; our life as the vanguards of the movement would soon be over. But soon, too, we would have to experience life as wanted 'criminals' in China – if we were able to leave the square alive. We wondered whether we would see each other again and seemed to be saying a mute goodbye.

Chai Ling suddenly broke the silence. 'I feel so lucky to be alive,'

she said, looking at Feng Congde. 'Tomorrow is our first anniversary.' The atmosphere became lively at once. That was typical of Chai Ling – she could stir up the longing for a beautiful life in just one or two sentences.

Just then I heard a familiar voice calling me. 'Li Lu!'

I turned and saw Zhao Ming. She said, 'At last I've found you. I've been looking everywhere for you!'

I was fond of Zhao Ming, and I had never needed her so much as now but I said to her, 'Why are you still here? You must leave Beijing at once. Something will happen tonight.'

She smiled at me. 'Why so fierce? I've been here on the square all the time, looking for you. I won't leave if you don't leave with me. If you stay, I'll stay.'

Her sudden appearance here brought back all my longings for life and its beauty. I held her in my arms and gave her a long kiss, forgetting there were so many people around me. Everyone chuckled indulgently. Chai Ling said, 'I never thought Li Lu could be so romantic.'

'I'm twenty-three years old,' I said. 'In my short life, I've experienced everything but sex and marriage. I may die at any time. I owe myself this pleasure.'

Amid the laughter, Chai Ling said, 'Then why don't you two get married right now? We'll find you a tent for your bridal chamber, so you can close your eyes before you die.'

Suddenly, everyone took the suggestion seriously. I asked Zhao Ming, 'How about it?'

She said casually, 'As you wish.'

But there was a problem. 'We have no wedding sweets and wine. How can it be a proper wedding?'

Someone said, 'We have bread the people sent us. It'll make you stronger, better than sweets. And we have salt water to replace the wine. Without it we would not have lived until today.'

My friends seemed able to solve all problems, so I named another. 'Can we find a marriage certificate?'

'Here it is,' said Zhang Boli. 'I'm preparing one.' He checked our ages and wrote: 'Li Lu, male, 23, and Zhao Ming, female, 25, are willing to be husband and wife to the end of their lives. We hereby grant the necessary approval.' At the end he placed the stamp of the hunger strike headquarters. 'There. That makes it absolutely official!'

A foreign journalist came in with a television camera and many others came to congratulate us.

Chai Ling said we should have the wedding ceremony at the Monument to the People's Heroes.

'We need a bridesmaid and best man,' I said. 'Chai Ling and Feng Congde, would you do us the honour?'

At once they came to our side. Chai Ling said, 'Of course. And it will also be a ceremony for our first anniversary.'

Zhang Boli, with the marriage certificate in his hand, automatically became the justice of the peace. Jai Yong gathered guards to protect us.

News of our wedding spread like wildfire and everyone crowded around us. There were too many people for us to reach the Monument to the People's Heroes, so we walked around the square. Some people sang the 'Wedding March'. A doctor brought the salt water and shouted, 'Here comes the wine.' People toasted us, wanted to shake hands with us. Gifts poured in – clothes, sweets, pens, and even leaflets when the donor had nothing else to offer (by custom every wedding guest must bring a gift, no matter how small). On the back of the leaflets was written, 'Best wishes.' The 'Wedding March' turned into the 'Internationale', and everybody joined in joyfully.

I understood why people responded so strongly to our wedding. It was the symbol of their longing and hope. And many certainly knew the story from fifty years before, of when a young couple were arrested because their beliefs offended the Government and later executed. At the execution ground they announced to the whole world that they were married. They wanted to show that though they could be killed physically their beliefs and their unity could never be eliminated from their souls. People were shouting, 'It's a wedding on the execution ground.' Many more corrected them, 'No, it's a wedding on the square. The square is not an execution ground. It is still in our hands!'

We came to an open space. People cried out, 'Speech, speech!'

I repeated a haunting phrase from Chai Ling's speech before the hunger strike. 'We are now fighting with the courage that defies death for a life that's worth living. My slogan is "We have to fight, but we must marry too." '

People applauded and took up the chant: 'We have to fight, but we must marry too.' Then again the chanting dissolved into the 'Internationale'. We had five wedding ceremonies at different parts of the square. An hour later when we reached the monument, our loudspeaker broadcast the ceremony again. I looked at the sea of banners of all colours and at the tens of thousands of people greeting us with a V sign. Zhao Ming and I shared a long kiss to show our happiness and gratitude, our love for each other and our longing for life and the future.

That night, Zhao Ming and I had no time for the bridal chamber. We were expecting the army to move in at 1 a.m. as announced by the Government on television. We had an emergency conference at which we agreed that apart from a few key personnel, all would leave and go underground. I had chosen to stay on the square. After the wedding, I felt life was complete and I was ready to fight to the end. When I'd said goodbye to all of my closest comrades – Chai Ling, Feng Congde, Zhang Boli – and forced Zhao Ming to leave the square, I felt uneasy. I was only twenty-three. Was my life about to end just like this?

When I was finally alone, I became calm. Two students came up and insisted on becoming my bodyguards. I was ready to make the ultimate sacrifice and didn't feel I needed bodyguards but they refused to leave. One o'clock came and went. The Government announced that the army would come and clear the square at 5 a.m. I fell asleep.

The next morning when my new bodyguards woke me, the sun was blazing over the square. About 100,000 people were still there, and it appeared that nothing had happened during the night.

By the afternoon of 22 May, my friends had slowly returned to the square with many questions. We felt the need for a new central command post as the hunger strike had ended. That evening we called a meeting which lasted through the night. Eighty-nine university groups sent representatives and we held elections for new officers. Because most knew the members of the hunger strike committee and were aware of the work we had done, we were overwhelmingly returned, Chai Ling as commander, Feng Congde, Zhang Boli, and I as deputy commanders, Guo Haifeng as general secretary. Zhang Long would command the pickets, Lao Mu would head the propaganda section and Liu Suli, a teacher from the University of Politics and Law, would head the liaison section. Wang Dan and Wang Chaohua were elected to the standing committee. Wang Dan was the co-ordinator of the student group, and Bao Zungxung for the intellectuals' group. We set a time to meet every day to talk about the situation and our work.

On 23 May, we moved the headquarters out of the bus and back to the steps of the monument. Many students were still streaming in from other parts of the country, usually coming directly to Tiananmen Square. A number asked to work for us; some joined the pickets.

We constantly received military information. The night before a group of students had tried to stop the army train from coming in and more than thirty had been wounded. One of the leaders ran to the square to tell us what had happened, arriving with blood all over his face, fainting after making his report.

And on the afternoon of 23 May, there was another chilling incident. The huge portrait of Mao Zedong on the square was defaced with ink. The three culprits were caught and brought to some of the guards. They had no ID cards, were not students and looked as though they had come from out of town. This would give the Government a good excuse to suppress the students.

On 24 May, Chai Ling told us happily that some intellectuals were setting up a conference to bring together almost all the existing organisations in the capital to defend the Constitution and the nation. The square headquarters would be a member of the conference. We went to the first meeting, which took place at the Academy of Social Sciences. The participants included well-known scholars like Bao Zungxung, young and middle-aged theoreticians and lawyers, and Wang Juntao and Chen Ziming, both central figures in the Democracy Wall movement.

The joint conference began disappointingly. The intellectuals were good at analysing the situation and making proposals, but were weak and indecisive when it came to action. Many organisations existed in name only, like the Independent Workers' Union. The leaders of several organisations had changed many times. The organisation of intellectuals consisted of only a few active members and other groups had even fewer. The Independent Workers' Union had tried to set up a general strike but failed. Other than the square headquarters, these organisations had little power.

Some of the intellectuals were still debating whether any crisis existed in China. Some believed that we should wait for the National People's Congress, which was to meet on 20 June; others didn't want to provoke the authorities. Some produced letters from old leaders such as Nie Rongzhen, Xu Xiangqian, and Deng Yingchao to show the authorities had become more moderate. But those of us who were at the forefront of the struggle knew what was in store for us, and that moderation could not be expected.

Few at the conference knew anything about future strategies but Qiu Yanliang, a teacher from Hong Kong University, said, 'We must be prepared for a protracted struggle. No matter what the army units do – they may arrest the students, but I don't think they will open fire on them – we should remain in the square. We can invite professors to give lectures on basic concepts of democracy to enlighten the students. We can also organise concerts and other recreational activities to attract people to the square. In this way we'll always have thousands of people here. We can even set up a university. The square will be our republic.' Though his idea did not seem to fit in with the serious atmosphere at the conference, it impressed me deeply.

The resolution the conference came to was that the square was a symbol which should not fall, that the conference would lead the movement, that we should strengthen grassroots groups. A statement was drafted, 'The Final Battle between Light and Darkness'. The Chinese nation, it said, was at a critical but hopeful time. The masses had stood up. The act of safeguarding Tiananmen Square was the source of our strength and spirit. We firmly demanded the recall by peaceful means of the phoney government headed by Li Peng and Yang Sangkung.

At 1.30 p.m. on 24 May we held a pledge-taking rally in front of the monument. We announced the election of the leaders; Wang Dan read the statement. Finally Chai Ling led 100,000 people in the pledge.

Work then resumed: we issued passes and set up new guard lines but most importantly we had to decide our future strategy. At 9 p.m. we began a meeting of over four hundred representatives from 300 universities around the country. We knew there were many plain-clothes police among the people but all we could do about that was to have two layers of pickets and issue special passes for the representatives.

Chai Ling said a few words on behalf of the headquarters. Feng Congde, Zhang Boli and then the representatives spoke. Tempers ran high. Some said, 'We'd better go right now to stop the army units from driving in instead of talking here.' It was hard to keep the meeting in order. People were excited and nervous and everyone wanted to talk at once.

Chai Ling asked me to chair the meeting. At this moment a foreign journalist shone a light on to the meeting place to televise it. Everyone protested, ashamed at revealing their disorder, and yelled at him to stop. Frightened, he turned off the light. Then there were a few seconds of silence. I seized this chance and stood at the microphone. 'We are gathered here today not to discuss military questions or how to stop army trucks. We have already planned what to do if anything happens. It is the same as last night. No matter what happens we will use peaceful means. We'll be informed immediately if something goes wrong.

'Now we should sit down and discuss the strategies for tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, the future of the Democracy Movement, the future of China. The central questions are what we should do next, what action the students on the square should take. The student movement has turned into a movement of the whole nation. But the students are still the pillar of the movement. Tiananmen Square has become the source of strength and spirit for the Democracy Movement.

'Whatever we do here will influence the entire nation. We'll discuss whether we will remain or withdraw, and what will then be the next step. And remember that you will be representing your college when you vote, not yourself.' I seemed always to be stressing the fundamental concepts of representative democracy; while 'democracy' was an ideal and a rallying cry, people knew very little about it or how it worked. 'We must keep calm. We are shouldering the responsibility for the future of China.'

By now the meeting was very quiet. 'With hundreds of people here, it'll be impossible for everybody to speak. I have summed up the ideas we've heard here into several proposals. Please tell us what you think of them. Do you agree to go about it this way?' They all said they did. I put forward the four proposals: to stay in the square and hold talks with the Government, gradually leaving as they accepted our demands; to stay in the square, but to consider the Government our enemy, to launch strikes, call for special meetings of the Party and the National People's Congress, and try to stage a coup within the army, the Government, or the Party; to keep the movement pure and not get involved in any power struggle, persuading the Government and Party to negate the 26 April editorial and state that the student movement is democratic and patriotic. If we decided to choose this proposal, we would then discuss whether to remain or leave the square; the fourth proposal involved withdrawal from the square. Before we left we would demand that the Government promise, for example, not to punish the students.

After three hours' discussion we voted. I divided the meeting into five sections to make it easier. I told everyone to give a brief account of the meeting to the students and abide by the result of the voting.

About eighty representatives had not been able to come to this meeting, so I spent another two hours talking to them. At 4 or 5 a.m. the result of the voting was compiled. There were 288 valid votes; 162 wanted the frontal attack; 80 wanted to remain in the square and carry out dialogue with the Government; 38 wanted to persist in the purity of the student movement and not get involved in the power struggles at the top; 8 wanted to leave the square. We would not be leaving the square.

On 26 May we began to carry out our plans to push for a special meeting of the National People's Congress, divide the soldiers, launch workers' strikes, give speeches in other cities, print leaflets, set up a university in the square.

A representative came on behalf of Li Peng and the whole Politburo. When we asked his name and job he didn't answer, as if we had no right to know. 'The mobilisation of the army is not aimed at the students,' he said. 'The soldiers will not harm the students. But if the students are stubborn and do not leave the square, we will have to enforce martial law and remove the students. There may be conflict or bloodshed, but we will not use weapons to deal with them. Tanks and missiles are not used to solve internal conflict.

'Now, all the students must go back to college without any conditions. There is nothing to negotiate on this point. As to whether the student movement is a riot, we can talk about that later.' We asked him whether the Government would take its revenge. He said it would not. He was not very forthcoming.

We needed to know the Government's plans. We told him that we had taken a vote and that the students did not want to leave the square. We said we had tried to persuade them to leave, but that they opposed us. He said, 'You need not worry about that. If it is necessary, we have many people in the square to help you.' The implication was only too clear.

We asked how we could distinguish those who could help us. But by now he was wary of our questions, and only promised help if we would contact him; he gave us his room number in a nearby hotel.

On 27 May Chai Ling attended the meeting of the joint conference of organisations. When she came back to the headquarters, she reported to us that the conference had formulated a ten-point statement and called for a massive demonstration on 30 May, after which the students would withdraw from the square.

This last point surprised me. Just two days earlier, representatives from 300 colleges had voted to remain in the square. How could that decision be reversed so quickly? I said that this was against democratic procedure.

She told us that the statement originally suggested an end to everything on 20 June when the National People's Congress would be convened, but people would find it hard to hold out until then so it was suggested to end on 30 May after a major demonstration.

I felt that if we did this we would be in a dangerous position. Once we left, the army would come into the square making the special meeting of the Congress and other things impossible. Beijing would be under army control. It would be impossible to organise a demonstration. The army could surround each college and block its exit. They would imprison student leaders. The students would protest, but in vain. The National People's Congress would be held under bayonets. Our hopes would be gone.

Later that day, a press conference was held in the square to announce the ten-point statement. All student leaders, old and new, attended, as well as representatives from intellectual groups. It was also the last major press conference. At the end, Wang Dan read the joint conference's statement:

(1) The present Democracy Movement is the greatest in Chinese history, a true people's movement, independent of the power struggle within the Party executive. Political power could not control the movement, but had to adjust itself to it.

(2) The movement's starting point was to enhance political reforms and eliminate corruption. That was why it won such great support from the people.

(3) The movement was an important test of the Party and its leaders.

(4) The people demanded Li Peng and his ilk be recalled because they opposed and had become enemies of the people.

(5) Comrade Zhao Ziyang, the general secretary of the Party committee, took a calm and reasonable attitude towards the student movement. We appreciated this attitude.

(6) A Party that wins the hearts of the people will stay; a Party that goes against the hearts of the people will be thrown out. The attitude of the people towards the Party depended on its own attitude towards the movement, now and in the future.

(7) The idea that the people's Democracy Movement was a reflection of the power struggle within the Party and a tool manipulated by the 'black hand' of top leaders in the Party was ridiculous. Some thought that when Zhao Ziyang was expelled from his post, the movement would end. This was ridiculous. The power struggle in the Party could not end the Democracy Movement. The end of the movement would decide the outcome of the struggle within the Party. The coming to power or losing of power by an individual leader would not affect the direction of the movement.

(8) Our immediate goals were to lift martial law, withdraw the army units, negate the 26 April editorial, and openly state that the movement was patriotic and democratic in nature, accept the legal position of mass organisations, and call an emergency meeting to discuss the recall of Li Peng. If no meeting was called in the next few days, the demonstration in Tiananmen Square would last until 20 June, when the National People's Congress would be held.

(9) The movement had maintained the principles of peace, reason and non-violence. If anyone wanted to eliminate the movement by military means, he would be digging his own grave. He would be pushing the Party, the Government, the army to a dead end.

(10) The great 27 April demonstration was a brilliant page in modern history. To commemorate this event, a month later we issued this statement. We proposed to the people of China to make 27 May the Festival of Freedom and Democracy.

After the press conference, the members of the headquarters met and discussed the situation. We summed up the work of the last few days. We had not done enough to take care of our own people. Corruption had emerged among the middle level student leaders. Some were power-hungry. Others were not responsible in their work. Chai Ling and Feng Congde were disappointed. We decided I should straighten things out at headquarters.

Zhang Boli would examine the work and people at the broadcasting station. We decided to start a broadcasting free forum – two hours during which anyone could say anything.

A few days earlier, eight art colleges had offered to build a statue of a Goddess of Democracy. The headquarters had given them 7,000 *yuan* for supplies and the artists were now working on it. We decided to set up a Democracy University under the statue. Though we could not yet launch a frontal attack on the Government, we could make Tiananmen Square the fount of democracy in China, a college to cultivate talented people and leaders, a base for a future democracy in the country.

We held meetings with the representatives every day, and agreed to continue the sit-in until 20 June and also to try to persuade students from out of town to go back to their colleges to spread the movement there.

There were many good people, who worked conscientiously but bribery and embezzlement also appeared at the headquarters. People made donations but some of those working there stole the money and disappeared. I was furious.

At the same time, the Government was going all-out in bribing students. One student was recruited by them and installed in a suite in the Capital Hotel. He used people like Wu Lai, Wang Dung, and others intent on fame and position, and plotted to work to the Government's advantage.

There was an incident in which someone at headquarters found a bottle of hydrochloric acid among bottles of water donated by supporters. The atmosphere became very tense.

People were scared. On the evening of 29 May, we heard for the third time that the Government had a black-list ready. Every time the list was different, but certain names were always on it. We knew the Government would not be too harsh with most students, who would be beaten and told to write self-criticism. But we also knew that the leaders would be punished more severely.

The intellectuals who had helped organise the joint conference began to move out. The head of our liaison section and the propaganda section sent by the joint conference left too. Zhang Boli said he wanted to write a book about the student movement and asked Chai Ling for permission to leave, as did Lao Yi and Lao Yu. Zhang Long, the commander of the guards who graduated from Beijing University, was tall and stout; we had hoped he would try to keep the pickets in order, but after a few days he developed hepatitis and had to resign.

Chai Ling was subject to the greatest pressure. All complaints went to her so she was the focus of every dispute. That night at the meeting she said she wanted to resign. 'I'd like to go on working, but I've

come to the end of my strength, both physically and mentally. Please forgive me, and approve my resignation.'

I, too, felt I had reached my limit. May 29 was a sad day. Many of my friends left. I missed them very much, especially Chai Ling. I was depressed and felt I did not want to be responsible for anything any more.

As I wandered around the square, I saw a familiar figure, sweeping the ground outside the tent – a little village boy who had wanted to speak at the first meeting I chaired. I went up and asked him whether he remembered me.

'Yes,' he said. 'I'm glad to see you again.'

'Why are you still here?' I asked. 'Don't you miss your home?'

His face blanched as he said, 'Yes, of course.'

'Aren't your parents worried about you?'

'Yes, they are.'

'Then why don't you go home?'

He scratched his head and said, 'I like it here. I get meals and a place to sleep. There are so many people, and many things are happening. People are good here; they don't bully you. People help you bring your case to the authorities. If you are right, you can say it. You can argue using reason.'

I thought of his parents' suffering, those village cadres whom I knew only too well. They were like the cadre Gao Qing, the man in charge of the orchard commune outside Tangshan, the one who refused to give a roll of tarpaper to the people whose house had been destroyed. I asked him, 'What are you doing now?'

'I have come to know many big brothers and sisters. They are very nice to me. They teach me how to read and write.'

Feeling much better, I said goodnight to him and continued my wanderings.

The free forum was still being broadcast. A monk was speaking. 'China has never had freedom of belief,' he said, 'but it is very important to the development of Buddhism and to the improvement of human life.' A worker spoke after him. He said workers should have their own rights. They should not be manipulated by others. His speech was simple and down to earth. A teacher talked about the backwardness of Chinese education.

People listened attentively. The square was full of banners. Many people came with their families. I walked amid the crowds and an atmosphere of freedom permeated the air.

An intellectual was speaking. 'I love the square. In the square I am not afraid. But I'm afraid at home.' People laughed. He went on, 'But I still want to come. I feel this is really a people's square, and the country is our own country. We are the masters of the country.

'When I'm at home, I'm scared. All kinds of misfortunes will happen if the movement fails. I have parents and wife and children. I have a lot of responsibility. But when I come to the square and see the students sleep on the bare ground, I feel ashamed. But I feel I am a genuine human being here.

'Only today have I realised how dissatisfied we are with the system. We hate the society. I was excited when the hunger strike started. People were so brave. The Chinese people seemed to have changed overnight. Now I know we have not changed. It's only that we have realised we are unhappy with our society. The society has never given us a chance to be unhappy about it before.'

A sense of duty and pride overcame my regret and bitterness. The ideal I had been pursuing was to build such a country. There were people who were thirsty for power and who had displayed a deep-rooted evil nature. But there were also people like Chai Ling and Feng Congde. The 4,000 hunger strikers were especially courageous and great. We had achieved so much in such a short time.

A teacher from Beijing University said to me, 'Isn't the square like a small republic? You have everything – radio station, newspaper, university, administrative system, government, parliament. You're doing a great thing.' Listening to his words I knew we had succeeded, whatever steps the Government now took to crush us. What we had done would never be forgotten.

Chai Ling came back that afternoon. She told us excitedly that she could continue as commander – she felt her strength returning. A friend from Hong Kong took us to a hotel, and for the first time in weeks we had a bath and changed into clean clothes. Friends from Hong Kong had brought money and material; we could now pull down the old tents and put up new ones. The biggest could hold fifty people, the medium twenty, and the smallest four. In the south of the square we set up small tents; in the north the bigger ones. We divided it into eight sections.

We prepared a base for the statue of the Goddess of Democracy, which we were expecting to arrive the night of 30 May.

The next day was 1 June, Children's Day. We arranged to have parties with the children. We wanted them, too, to remember the struggles of their big brothers and sisters.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Massacre

It was still pitch dark on the morning of 1 June. The long meeting of the night before had only ended an hour or two earlier. I was shaken awake. 'Someone's looking for you.'

'Li Lu, come quickly!' I recognised the voice of one of the secretaries from headquarters.

I scrambled over the sleeping bodies of the medical students; I had slept in their tent that night. After martial law was declared, there was a danger that government agents would try to abduct student leaders, so we slept in a different place each night. Outside, I saw the secretary looked agitated. 'What's up?'

'Chai Ling and Feng Congde have been arrested!'

'*What?* Where are they?'

'At headquarters. Come.' I was confused. How could they be arrested and still remain at headquarters? We had no time to think about it. We ran through the lanes of the sleeping tent city towards the monument. When we passed a guard on patrol, I told him to notify the head of the unit and to bring as many guards as he could. The headquarters tent was set up on the second terrace of the monument; when we got there, it was surrounded by people I didn't recognise.

I dashed into the tent and saw about a dozen men in a semi-circle facing the entrance. Chai Ling and Feng Congde sat half dressed on the floor in the middle. One of the three secretaries had put his coat over Chai Ling's shoulders. Around Feng Congde's neck hung a knotted scarf that had obviously been used as a gag.

'What's going on here?' I shouted. I looked around the startled faces; I recognised only Wu Lai, one of the power maniacs who always seemed to be plotting takeovers, and two of the other students who had kept rooms at the Capital Hotel. Wu Lai sat on a low stool facing my friends, pointing his finger threateningly in their faces, but when he saw me he froze. I was the only person at headquarters he feared, because I knew as well as he did how to act like a hooligan.

I asked the strangers who they were. They said they were workers, but they looked a little too comfortable with the students for that to be true. I couldn't help remembering the messenger from Li Peng who had told us there were plenty of government agents in the square to help if we decided to end the sit-in.

Wu Lai had never stopped trying to take over the headquarters since the failure of his 16 May attempt to become commander. He seemed to hate anyone better known than himself, and was constantly asserting his own position. He told anyone who would listen that *he* was the student leader, *he* was the one who led the hunger strike: 'There would have been no student movement if it weren't for Wu Lai,' he said.

In fact, no one seems to have known where he came from. He avoided any discussion of his past, he claimed to be a student at an agricultural-technical night school of which neither I nor others in the square had ever heard. He had no actual position in the movement, but hung around headquarters, flirting with the girls, talking to the reporters and adding his name in pencil to every published list of leaders.

It was impossible to take him seriously, and no one who knew him trusted him with power. Yet he had nearly succeeded in removing two of the movement's top leaders. The result was frightening to contemplate. If he, and whoever was behind him, ever managed to remove the leaders, the army could move in without organised opposition and crush the movement. And if the leaders were eliminated at the same time, there could be no underground network to continue the movement's work. Wu Lai and his like had the power to destroy the movement.

As I faced him now, I had to force myself to be calm. 'What's going on?' I repeated.

'We want to ask them some questions,' said Wu Lai. 'We've evidence of embezzlement.'

'Oh. It looks more like a kidnapping. If you don't release them, I'll be forced to conclude that it is a kidnapping, which, as you know, is a crime.'

Wu, realising that his kidnapping attempt had been foiled, began his questions. He said he knew each member of the headquarters got 1,000 *yuan* on 21 May. Wasn't that embezzlement? Why did he only get 100 *yuan*?

Chai Ling answered, 'That money is to carry on the work of the movement if it's forced underground. I doubt very much you'd ever work for the students if that happened, since all you're interested in is fame and wealth. How did you get even 100 *yuan*? Who gave it to you?'

Wu Lai insisted on knowing how her 1,000 *yuan* had been spent.

'You've no right to ask. But I don't object to telling anybody about it. I gave 200 *yuan* to the family who helped hide me on 21 May and bought clothes for me to disguise myself. Another 200 I gave to the guards for food. My secretary still has the other 600.'

The interrogation continued; while we could prevent them being taken away, the three secretaries, my bodyguard, and I were too few to throw the others out. We could only hold them off.

Feng Congde burst out, 'This is a kidnapping, and not a discussion about finances – remember that I'm the deputy commander in charge of finances, and I've got a lot of questions for you. But first, you must explain this kidnapping, and tell us whether you are a government agent or not!'

Our guards should have been there at once, but it was close to an hour before they began to arrive. When they did, I noticed that the strangers quickly sidled out. Wu Lai saw things weren't going his way, so he took the tapes of the questioning and tried to leave but before he could go, we took the tapes and gave them to Jai Yong to keep on file as a record.

The attempted kidnapping was not the only serious event that morning. Guards came to report that the wires of two of our loudspeakers had been cut, as had been the only telephone line from the headquarters to the outside world. We then discovered that the head of the guard unit had been drunk last night, which was unlike him. That was why the guards had been so slow.

Then we heard that Wang Dung, the head of a non-functioning Independent Union of Provincial Students in Tiananmen Square, was claiming to be the first chairman of the Independent Students' Union of Beijing Universities and was planning a press conference at the monument. His press release had said that all the students in

Tiananmen Square had voted to leave immediately; luckily, he was stopped before he could make this announcement.

Late that afternoon Chai Ling and Feng Congde told a press conference about the attempted kidnapping. It was a signal for everyone to be on the alert against government attempts to sow dissent and confusion.

It was still Children's Day. Once the children arrived, the atmosphere in the square became peaceful and festive. We gave each child an armband on which was written: 'Please remember for ever the Democracy Movement of 1989.' We broadcast to the children about the Democratic Movement their big brothers and sisters were leading, which they would understand when they grew up. 'We understand it now,' they said. We also thanked them for their donations in coins of one, two, or five *fen*.

The children came to see the students but also wanted to see the Goddess of Democracy. The statue had been moved to the square the day before. I took a group of children over to it at the north end of the square, the far end from Mao's mausoleum. There were thousands of people milling around it. I had been so busy that I hadn't time to look at it carefully. The statue was intended to be an eternal symbol of democracy, although this was only a temporary monument made of fibreglass.

Lines of guards surrounded it for protection. I noticed a few workers among the guards, middle-aged men wearing standard blue workclothes, politely keeping the crowds in order.

People asked, 'What does the statue mean?'

One of the workers said, 'It's a symbol for democracy.'

Another asked, 'Is she Chinese?'

The worker answered, 'Look at her face! You can tell she's Chinese even if she's wearing foreign clothes. Well, people in foreign countries had democracy earlier than us. We're learning from them. But our statue is Chinese because her face is Chinese. Look, she's even holding a Chinese torch!'

I suddenly recalled the old militiaman protecting the statue of Mao Zedong after the earthquake in Tangshan. This man's devotion was similar to his, even though the object was a very different symbol. China was changing – the statue was not being protected with guns, nor was it a monument to a specific person, but a symbol of individual liberty.

I thought of Mao's version of the story of the foolish old man who moved the mountain. Mao said the spirit of the foolish man moved God, and God sent two angels to move the mountain away. Mao compared the struggle of the Communist Party to the foolish man moving the mountain, and himself to God. But it was becoming clear now that when all the Chinese people became foolish men like the old man in the story, the mountain would certainly be moved without this God or angels.

On the evening of 2 June, Tiananmen Square was still peaceful. After Children's Day, more and more children knew what was going on in the square and came to visit with their parents. The problems of sanitation and public health had been largely solved. The new tents were set up in orderly rows, hundreds of flags flying over them. The preparatory work for Democracy University was in full swing, and a huge loudspeaker was on its way from Hong Kong.

In the headquarters, we were discussing the latest news. An announcement had been posted on walls around the city, signed by the thieves' association: 'To show our support of the student movement, we will go on strike. We will no longer steal.' Crime rates fell to the lowest point in history. Everyone seemed to be on strike in the city; no one, including transport workers and traffic police, went to work. Workers and ordinary citizens were helping to keep order.

The army had not advanced recently. Some people now believed, or hoped, that the Government would not be able to move the army in, at least before 20 June when the National People's Congress would meet and, we hoped, give us a fair hearing. But, deep in our hearts, some of us were expecting the worst.

When news first came near midnight on 2 June that the army had started to move into the city, I didn't take much notice of it. There had been rumours for days, although the army always seemed to pull back, avoiding confrontation with the unarmed people.

Then someone reported that an army unit had reached Sanhuan Road – only a kilometre from the square. Someone else came to tell us that a large unit was only 55 metres away. How could troops have advanced so close without our having heard anything about it? We knew that the people were still manning the barricades at every entrance to the city.

We immediately went on the alert. We called on all students and people of Beijing to mobilise and stop the trucks and tanks from coming closer. Representatives from schools had already gathered in front of the headquarters. We decided that we should keep order in the square, no matter what happened nearby. If we could prevent the army actually entering the square, we would be victorious. Even if they got in, we would still persist in the policy of not swearing if sworn at and not attacking if attacked. We must all keep cool.

More and more reports of troop movements poured in. People rushed to the headquarters, calling for all the students in the square to join them in blocking the army. They wanted to use the loudspeaker to stir people up. I could understand their impatience, but I was suspicious of the reports which didn't concur with other information we had of the major army units being blocked at the city's edges. Furthermore, publicising these reports could only make the atmosphere tense and possibly cause more violence in the end. I would not allow our decisions to be changed, so I grasped the microphone, sat down like a Buddha, and kept others away from it.

A strange, tense peace settled over the square. Over the loudspeakers, we broadcast Beethoven's Ninth Symphony; its solemn, magnificent music reverberated throughout the square, sounding so mysterious, so other-worldly, that it helped calm our worry and fear of death even as it elevated our souls.

At 3 a.m. on 3 June, students on bicycles started streaming into the square from all directions. By daybreak, hundreds of thousands of people had gathered in the square to protect and defend it. By this time we had learned that the troop movements consisted of only a thousand or so very young soldiers. But the atmosphere was still very tense.

People who came to the square were very angry. They said that the soldiers in the streets had looked lost; when asked why they wanted to go to Tiananmen Square, they did not seem to know. But they had their orders – and they would go. In some places people surrounded them; their anger exploded when they found ropes and daggers in the soldiers' pockets. Some young people took these weapons on their bicycles and rode around the city to show how vicious the soldiers were. And then came the news that in last night's chaos, four people had been run over by an army truck.

By noon the soldiers had finally fought their way out of the city, leaving a lot of weapons behind them. They also abandoned a van after a crowd had surrounded them. When the van's doors were broken open, they were surprised to discover that it was filled with

weapons. Some of the youngsters grabbed rifles and machine guns to show off, thinking they had won a great victory.

All this news reached our headquarters, along with some of the captured weapons. The situation was deeply worrying. Anything could happen at this moment. We felt able to control what was happening in the square but not take the full weight of responsibility for the city. We told people to let the soldiers leave the city immediately, unhindered, and we sent teams of students to collect all the abandoned weapons.

Soon they came back with the surprising report that none of the weapons was functional. Some of the guns had rusted barrels; most had had their firing pins removed. This worried me even more; it could only be part of a deliberate plot, a set-up. I quickly decided to turn the weapons over to the police department and make sure to get a signed receipt.

At 2 p.m., to the west of the square in front of Xinhuamen, another bloody incident occurred. Students were picketing in front of the gate, when suddenly the gate opened and two or three hundred of the special police who guard the leaders in Zhongnanhai rushed out and beat the students. We sent out our bus with the loudspeaker to tell people to stay calm and cool, and to turn in any weapons they found to the police. When the bus got to Xinhuamen, the police again beat the students, and at the same time threw more than thirty tear gas canisters.

A student in the bus shouted over the loudspeaker, 'The people love the people's police, and the people's police love the people! We come to bring peace and help keep order.' One policeman dragged the student from the bus, screaming, 'Fuck you, we don't love you,' kicked him to the ground, and beat him with his baton.

Similar incidents began to happen around the square. More and more wounded people were carried to the headquarters.

We felt the final showdown was approaching. Chai Ling, Feng Congde, and I decided to hold a press conference. We reported the troop movements of the night before, described the beatings at Xinhuamen, and showed the police receipt for the weapons we had turned in. I predicted that something serious would happen tonight, and requested that all journalists present pay attention and be ready to record the events for posterity.

It was 8 p.m., the evening after the press conference.

Television, radio and ubiquitous loudspeakers kept repeating, 'Citizens of Beijing, stay in your homes tonight. Students return to your colleges. The army is going to clear out Tiananmen Square tonight. Citizens of Beijing, stay in your homes . . .'

But, instead, the citizens of Beijing, worried about the students in the square, trooped out from their homes. About 300,000 of them gathered around the square. Everyone was filled with foreboding as to what might happen.

At around nine o'clock a student rushed up to our headquarters, his shirt soaked with blood, crying again and again, 'Just a baby, only three years old.' When he finally stopped crying, he spoke over our loudspeaker.

'My fellow students, people of Beijing, don't trust the Government any more. Don't trust the army. Just now to the west of the square, the soldiers hit whoever went past them including old people and children. An old man was injured. The soldiers wouldn't even let his grandson go. I ran over and grabbed hold of the child, but a soldier hit him with a brick, and he died in my arms. We must take revenge, we must take revenge.'

But now was not the time for revenge. I held back my indignation and grief, issuing the last emergency order of the headquarters. 'Today is 3 June 1989. History will call this a day of national humiliation. We'll remember this day for ever. The Government has once and for all torn off the veil covering its ferocious face. They are sending thousands of armed soldiers to suppress us, who have no weapons. We say down with the Li Peng Government and its atrocious rule. We call on all people to strike. We call upon the students to return to Tiananmen Square where we will continue to raise the banner of justice overcoming evil. We appeal to all officers and soldiers who love their country to stand up to the autocrats. You must not shoot the people! We appeal to people everywhere to assist the just struggle of the students. The people will ultimately triumph. Truth will ultimately win. Long live democracy. Long live the people. Long live the Chinese nation!' With the army closing in, we decided to move all the students who had been hunger strikers out of the tents and on to the steps of the monument. There we would all sit in together. If the army came, we would try to negotiate with the Government and evacuate the square. And if we had to die, we would die together. About 5,000 gathered, including many of the hunger strikers who had been in the square since 13 May. Many suffered from exhaustion and could barely move; they fell asleep as soon as they sat down. Some were so weak that they could not even stand up to leave the tents. To those 5,000 we repeated, be peaceful, don't swear back, don't hit back. 'We must welcome the butcher's knife with the most peaceful means,' Chai Ling kept repeating through the loudspeakers.

Shortly after this, I sat in the headquarters tent to the east of the monument wondering what the Government and the army would actually do. Would the people be able to stop the army from entering the square? Would the people hold to the principle of non-violence? And the soldiers – would they come over to our side and support us? If the soldiers did not make it today, would they break through tomorrow? Would the workers strike? Would some leaders publicly oppose the Government? Would some cities and provinces declare their independence? What should the Democracy Movement do next? My mind was overflowing, but I felt like a lantern shaking in the wind which might soon go out.

I looked up. A group of people had burst in, their clothes smeared with blood, their eyes wide open and stunned. Their hands trembled. One big man tightly grasped my hand, but I couldn't make out what he was saying. He stared into the distance as if looking at some terrible image. Finally, he told his story.

'At about eight in the evening at the intersection of Muxudi and Gongshuzen, I saw the army start to march towards the square. People tried to stop them with their bodies only this time the soldiers, followed by tanks, pushed their way forward, bayonets raised. A girl student from Beijing Normal University went up to the soldiers and said, "The students aren't rioters but patriots. We want to do good for our country." A soldier thrust his bayonet into her chest, and she fell down dead. The enraged people ran over to her, but the tanks kept coming and coming, and opened fire. Everywhere people were dropping. At first, we thought they must be using plastic bullets. We desperately tried to get our fallen comrades to stand up, but blood was running everywhere. Still people could not believe that the People's Government could have shot its own people. More and more people went up to the tanks to persuade them to stop, but as we tried to set up road blocks, more shots rang out, more people fell. The tanks never stopped and ran over the bodies. People cried and shouted, throwing stones, but to no avail. The bloody advance continued. More and more people charged, more and more fell.'

The big man stopped, his eyes still transfixed. We were all crying, our eyes turning towards that dark spot at which he stared. Finally he spoke again. 'This is the People's Army. People have provided for them for forty years. People have practised frugality to save every penny for the country to build cannons, tanks and machine-guns. Were we doing all this for the army to kill us? Many went up to the soldiers and said, "We aren't rioters, don't be taken in." But the bullets flew everywhere. People died. I ran all the way here to tell you. The soldiers are mad; they kill whoever is in their way. They are no longer human beings. Now they will soon be in the square. You had better run.'

Sparks of light danced in front of my eyes. Only the words about tanks, machine-guns and people being killed remained. Soon the square would be surrounded.

It was now nearly midnight. I sent out messengers to tell everyone at the edge of the square to come in to the centre and for the women and weaker people to leave the square at once. As I repeated the order over the loudspeaker, I could hear the distant sounds of shooting and the roar of tanks. The sky was lit, as if by lightning, by the shooting.

A doctor came and said, 'The soldiers have blocked the way in front of the Museum of History and will not allow us to take care of the wounded. An ambulance ran the risk and drove over to them anyway, but was turned back by a hail of bullets.' His face was covered with tears, his white overalls smeared with blood. 'They are thousands of times worse than the Fascists. They are even killing doctors.' He held my hand. 'I sent the badly wounded to the hospital, but the doctors there said, "It's no use. Don't send them any more. We can't save them. They're using a special kind of bullets. Dum-dum bullets. Just one direct hit brings death." '

Xiao Zhang, head of security for the University of Democracy, burst in to say, 'The Statue of Democracy has been torn down. There are dead bodies all over the place where two hundred thousand people once gathered,' he said. 'Some ran away, some are wounded and many dead. Two people died at my feet. I closed their eyes.' He held my shoulders and wept. 'People burned everything they could find to stop the troops. They even started fires on top of the tanks, and when the soldiers crawled out, wanted to kill them. Our guards helped rescue them from the crowds. I did too. I didn't want a human withdraw from the square at once, and offered to negotiate with the army on our behalf. There seemed to be no alternative, so the four of them left on their mission.

I sat in a tent listening to a girl's soft voice singing a favourite song of the students on the square,

'Perhaps I would take leave,
never to come back again.
If it were so,
would you forgive me?
Would you understand?
Perhaps I would fall down,
never to open my eyes again.
If it were so,
please don't grieve,
for when you look
at our national flag
you will see that its glories
have been written by my blood.'

From another direction came the 'Internationale'. As I listened to this now solemn and sad anthem, I saw in my mind the 5,000 people falling down quietly in a hail of bullets, falling without pain in each other's arms, blood flowing in streams across the square.

I jumped up and went to Chai Ling. 'Let's go and see the students for the last time. We should let them know that members of the headquarters are with all of them before the last moment arrives.' Chai Ling and I walked to the monument, each holding a microphone. Girls were placed in the middle. Stronger students sat in the outer circle. When they saw us, they applauded. I said, 'We members of the headquarters have spent so many days with all of you. Today is the last time we will be together. I hope everyone will face the last moment calmly. We will stick to the principle of non-violence to the very end. We won't swear when sworn at, we won't hit back when hit.' The words I had said so often now sounded pale and powerless. Was this the Government that taught us to love the Party, that had guaranteed that the Party and army loved the people? Was it the Government who said the people's army would not take even a single needle and thread from the people?

Chai Ling spoke to the students. 'There is a story about a clan of a billion ants who lived on a mountain. One day there was a terrible

fire on the mountain. The only way for them to escape was to hold each other tight into a ball and roll down the mountainside. But the ants on the outside of the ball would be burnt to death. We are now standing on the monument. We are the ones who stand on the outside of our nation. Only our sacrifice can save it, only our blood can open the eyes of our people and the rest of the world. Only in this way can our people stand up and bury a government and system that kill their children. But we don't want to kill anyone. We want peace, freedom and democracy. The highest principle of peace is sacrifice.'

Her words, so calm, seemed momentarily to defeat the monsters and devils. The hands that were raising the butcher's knife would surely tremble. But I was no longer confident. I felt so insignificant. We had done what we could – the demonstrations, the students' strike, the hunger strike. Now we were about to sacrifice our lives to defend our aspirations and rouse more people to continue our struggle. I knew there was a great deal that we had not done, and for me, for my generation, for the people in Beijing, it would take time to understand fully what we had done.

When I got back to the headquarters, the four intellectuals had returned. The army agreed that if the students left the square from the south-east corner by 7 a.m. they would not shoot. That concession seemed strange but there was no time for much thought. We who were determined to make the ultimate sacrifice were not the people to persuade others to leave; we had to rely on the four intellectuals to explain everything to them.

'We know that the army has opened fire on the people,' they said to the gathering crowd, 'but we still went to negotiate with them. We're sorry. It was the only thing we could do. Too much blood has been shed. We have no right to choose death. We have come here to seek a genuine life. We beg you to leave the square peacefully and conserve your energy for the future.'

There was no sound. Then we heard shouts of 'Shame on you!' 'That's surrender.' 'Get out of here!' I could understand. We had so much hope for the future; we had won the people's support. But we were beaten by the army. We had persisted day and night in the square in bad weather, without food, in insanitary conditions, but in the end what we got were tanks, machine-guns and massacre. We could only sit quietly on the ground hugging each other, and waiting for death.

By this time all the lights in the square were gone. Death seemed even closer in the dark. The four intellectuals were upset. Hou Dejian said in a heartrending voice, 'I know those of you who remain are not afraid of death. But such a government is not worth the sacrifice. We've already shed too much blood. Even if sacrifice is necessary, let us share the responsibility. We four intellectuals of the hunger strike will not leave the square until all the students are gone. I repeat, we have come here to seek a genuine life instead of death.'

There was another silence and no more shouting or swearing. People were moved, but no one budged. We tried to overcome our total exhaustion and pain, holding on to the last vestige of reason and calm. Chai Ling, Feng Congde and I realised that we must take a vote among the students as to what we should do. But there was no light in the square; it was impossible to have a meeting in the dark. In desperation, I suggested the vote should be shouted out.

Feng Congde yelled, 'One, two, and three.' Those who agreed to leave the square shouted, 'Leave!' Then he did the same for those who wanted to stay, and they shouted, 'Stay!'

The 'leave' voices seemed a little louder: we immediately ordered everyone to leave the square as fast as possible. First the students would leave from the south side, then the east, west, and finally the north. The pickets were to keep order. We told each college to carry their college flag so that the army could see clearly they were students.

The withdrawal began. Group after group of people stood up and moved slowly out of the square. Crying spread throughout but the lives of the 5,000 people seemed safe.

Suddenly we heard gunshots; the monument built to commemorate the martyrs of the People's Army was now being shot at by the People's Army. As our loudspeakers were knocked out, a burst of light flooded the square. Only five or six metres away from us we saw dozens of fully armed soldiers ready to shoot us. Trembling, I wanted to hurl myself at the soldiers and fight a last battle. Xiao Liu, my bodyguard, caught me immediately, held me back and pulled me down. The pickets and students from the south side, however, rushed up and encircled the leaders so that we were in the middle of the crowd. Another hail of bullets rained down on the headquarters tent. My sight went black with rage. People were still asleep in there.

Hundreds of armed soldiers, who had come up the north side of the monument, charged the crowd. The shrieks and gunshots created chaos. The north side of the square was a sea of fire. Sparks flashed past my eyes. In its light we saw dozens of tanks entering the

square; all the tents were being smashed under them. There were still hundreds of people in them. They had gone to sleep, too weak to move, thinking the worst would be that the police would haul them on to a bus and send them back to college. Now they were being ground to pieces. My mind was numb. No feeling. I saw the gunfire streaking through the air. People falling.

A picket asked, 'How about the exit ahead of us? Are we surrounded?' I abruptly shook myself and looked at my watch. It was 4.50 a.m., more than two hours before the 7.00 a.m. deadline the army had set, and the withdrawal had been going on for only ten minutes. If the exits were blocked, the 5,000 unarmed people would have no hope of survival. Chai Ling, Feng Congde and I ran to the south-east corner and saw soldiers and students facing each other. An officer issued an order and the soldiers turned round and ran away from us. Were they on our side? Or was it some other plot? We had no time to think. Chai Ling and I were now in front of the crowd. We passed word asking everyone to run and leave the square, shrouded in smoke, as fast as they could.

We led the students along the south side, then along the far side of the Great Hall of the People on to West Chang'an Avenue where it was said that the most terrible massacre took place. We looked for dead bodies on the way, but saw only burning cars and trucks, pieces of roadblocks and bicycles pressed flat by tanks, doors and shop windows full of bullet holes, broken stones and bottles. The smell of explosives was everywhere – but no bodies, only blood smears on the ground. The butchers had secretly moved away the corpses.

The smell of gas was all around, and shots erupted again. Tanks were roaring up behind us. Our 5,000 people were stretched over two kilometres. We did not know what was happening. A student ran up to us, shouting, 'Those Fascists, those dogs! The army is a Fascist army!' Then he told us that a number of tanks had driven up and shot at the end of the line. Dozens fell; at least ten were crushed by the tanks. Students cried hysterically and waved their fists. We came to a crossroads. Some students wanted to go back to Tiananmen Square to fight the soldiers, but Beijing residents now came up to stop us. An old woman of over seventy knelt in front of the students and said, 'My children, please don't go. They have machine-guns waiting for you. Please live on. You will certainly live longer than I. I may not see the victory. But you will, some day.'

We decided to go back to our colleges. People shouted names –

parents trying to find their sons and daughters, wives looking for their husbands, teachers searching for their students. Groups of people split off in different directions. Residents lined both sides of the street looking at us, in stunned shock. Only a few weeks before, in the same place, they had hailed us with applause. Later they joined the demonstrations. Now we could only face each other in tears.

I thought of those who would never awaken in the tents in the square. Black, ghostly tanks, the roaring of the caterpillar tracks, the flying flesh and blood rose before my eyes. My mind became stone. Only one thought was chiselled on it: why am *I* still alive?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Morning Star

By the time we got back to the campus of Beijing University, it was late afternoon. Our troop now numbered a few hundred; along the way, groups had headed for other campuses, and individuals had fallen exhausted by the wayside to be taken in by sympathetic citizens. After the tank shot at us, we saw no soldiers. All along the way, grieving people brought us food and drink and we stopped again and again to talk, to grieve together, to curse the Government.

Most of those who made it back to the campus were students from other cities; students from Beijing were assigned to take care of them. Finally the last of us, the core group from the headquarters, needed somewhere to have a final meeting. We were taken to a small room next to the broadcasting station for the Voice of Democracy.

The man who brought us there was Tiao Tiao, the secretary of the Independent Students' Association of Beijing University. He said the situation was very bad. Many student leaders had gone underground. Tanks and army trucks were seen around the universities. There were rumours that the army would enter the campuses tonight. I asked him why he was still there. He said we needed people to do the work. 'I'll work until they arrest me,' he said, turning back to his desk.

The rest of us sat down. Most were so tired that they immediately fell asleep. Only Feng Congde and I remained awake, talking, planning the next step. We decided that the only way was to go underground individually and work alone. But we would keep in touch; we exchanged addresses of likely hiding places, and arranged passwords, liaisons, and regular times and methods for contacting each other.

He took out the few thousand *yuan* left from the headquarters treasury and divided it among the seven or eight of us.

Now we had to part. None of us wanted to move. We had known each other for only a few weeks, but we had shared everything together, and had wandered back and forth between life and death several times.

Parting was especially hard for Chai Ling and Feng Congde; they had just celebrated their first anniversary. Though they had seen each other every day during the last weeks, they hadn't had much time to be together. But now, if the two of them went together, they would be discovered more easily.

I thought of Zhao Ming, my pitiful newly wed bride. Where was she now? She was such a happy and naïve girl. She should not have married me. She simply did not belong to such a life. I could not think any more. I could not stand it.

Soon the army would enter the campus; I hugged everybody and wished them well. Walking out of the door, I saw some of our bodyguards still standing outside. It would have been impossible to show enough gratitude for their loyal protection; all I could do was give them each some money for a train ticket and tell them to leave Beijing at once.

My own bodyguard, Xiao Liu, did not want to leave and insisted on coming with me. We were like brothers, and I owe my life to him. That morning, when the soldiers appeared at the monument, I would have died had he not pulled me to the ground beside him. I didn't even want to insist that he leave.

We borrowed two bicycles and left Beijing University together. Xiao Liu had grown up in the country, simple, kind-hearted and sincere. An expert at martial arts, he had become a scout in the army. Afterwards, as a student at Beijing University, he became an activist; at Tiananmen Square, he joined the guard unit and made full use of his expertise.

On the evening of 21 May, when the Government first threatened to clear the square, he offered himself as my bodyguard. I didn't want a bodyguard, but from then on he followed me wherever I went. He wanted to take care of my meals. Embarrassed at this attention and used to fending for myself, I tried to stop him at first, but gradually I found I could not manage without him, as bodyguard, secretary and general factotum. Now we would wander together.

Xiao Liu was so honest that he could be easily taken in. As soon as we left the campus, I knew we were being followed. A man came up to us on a bicycle and talked to us about the massacre. Xiao Liu naïvely told him of his experience and told the man proudly that he had been working in the headquarters.

In my exhaustion, I hadn't been paying much attention, but now I noticed that the man's expression changed. Suddenly I saw the backpack he wore, and realised it must hold either a walkie-talkie or a pistol. I was nervous again. Probably he would take no action in the street, since if I shouted there would be passers-by to help us. But there must be other plain-clothes men around.

We were cycling on the highway circling Beijing, heading towards an overpass. One lane led under the overpass, and the other led on to the exit ramp and the overpass. I slowed down abruptly, pretending that something was wrong with my sprocket and Xiao Liu, ever ready to help me, slowed down too. Our plain-clothes man passed us at full speed, looked over his shoulder to see where we were headed, and opted for the lower lane. As soon as he was past the entrance to the exit ramp, I swerved on to it and pedalled uphill for dear life. At the top of the ramp, we turned left and saw that the man had turned round, dismounted, and was now talking into his walkie-talkie.

By this time Xiao Liu had realised his mistake and cursed himself. Around us, several cyclists turned and followed us. I waved goodbye to them and started pedalling furiously, dodging into side streets and through back alleys, trying to shake them off. At one point I was pretty sure we were out of sight of all of them and stopped long enough to turn my windbreaker inside out so that the broadcast description of a cyclist in a green jacket wouldn't match with the white one I now wore. Xiao Liu stuffed his jacket into his bag and off we rode, dodging through the back streets I knew from visits to my Beijing grandparents.

It was an hour before I felt confident we had shaken them off and we approached the first safe house on my list. That one turned out to be too dangerous; at the second, nobody was at home. It was midnight when we reached the third; I was so tired that I could hardly go on. The host was a friend of mine but he wasn't in. The only thing I could do was to pry open a window and climb in. As soon as we were inside, I lay down and fell into an exhausted slumber.

When I woke up I was surprised to see it was dark outside. Xiao Liu was already up. He told me I had slept almost a whole day and night.

My friend's neighbour, a big man in his thirties with a long face, had heard us come in the night before. He knew who we were and had talked to Xiao Liu. Now that I was awake, he brought us a pot of hot noodles. The moment I saw the food, I fell on it, and finished three bowls without pausing.

Meanwhile the man told us the news. It was appalling: the soldiers had not stopped the killing. Whenever they saw people in groups, they shot at them. The people of Beijing still could not believe that the army had shot at its own people. There had never been war in Beijing. Even in the Japanese occupation there wasn't much fighting, and in 1949 the city was liberated peacefully. People had heard gunshots for two days and nights; some of them tried to reason with the soldiers, but the answer they got was bullets.

Our neighbour told us he'd heard that a single man had stopped twenty tanks on Chang'an Avenue. People were talking about his courage everywhere. I thought of the night of the massacre: many people were trying to stop the tanks with their bodies, but all died under the tracks.

'What does that mean?' I asked myself.

The big man repeated, 'He was a real hero.'

'The tank driver was a hero too,' I said under my breath.

He didn't hear me quite clearly. 'What did you say?' he asked. 'The soldiers were heroes too? Nonsense. They're all murderers.'

Scenes of the massacre swirled in my mind. Images of the dead bodies, the garish colours tore at my eyes. I asked myself what I would do next. So much blood had been spilled; so much more was yet to be spilled. If we countered violence with violence the army would surely win, for it had the arsenals; all we had was sticks and stones. The only hope we had was if the whole Chinese people rose up together, without violence, but with invincible unity. This third wave of the movement could then arrive at its destined shore.

Over the next few days, staying each night in a different place, I contacted some headquarters members who were still in Beijing. We dispatched groups of students north and south, to tell people about the massacre.

But that was not enough. I tried to organise students to write a one-hour radio or television programme on the movement and we watched carefully for an opportunity to occupy one of the central broadcasting stations. I felt that even one hour of broadcast time would be enough to persuade the Chinese people to rise up peacefully. If we used this opportunity well opposition within the army and the Government would follow, and the Government would fall. The broadcasting station would be the headquarters of the new Chinese Government.

In the next few days, the people of Beijing began to resist the Government with violence. Every night there were confirmed reports of soldiers on guard duty disappearing. In every major city of China, there were reports of resistance – the effect of the arrival of student groups from Beijing.

The situation appalled me. I knew that these movements which sprang up by themselves could easily turn to violence and if that happened the army would win. China would regress again. The only way to bring the movement into a third wave was to remain non-violent and united.

It didn't take long to discover that my hopes of occupying a broadcasting station could never come true. All radio and television stations, newspaper and magazine offices were now guarded by soldiers with fixed bayonets. More than a thousand soldiers occupied the central station. We thought of disguising ourselves as reporters and penetrating the stations that way but I found out that the reporters were under house arrest at the station. Special committees directed by the secret police issued all the 'news'.

An important member of our headquarters came to me with encouraging information – a group of students had found a radio transmitter in their institute. It had been installed for research, but could be used to broadcast nationally. My heart lifted. The set-up the student offered seemed perfect for a new headquarters. 'The only thing we need now,' he told me, 'is a technical person to run it, and a team of guards to defend it.'

The next day was busy and exciting. I rehearsed my planned radio speech over and over again.

At night the student returned. The technical person still couldn't be found. And it appeared that the Government had noticed the potential of the radio transmitter: the electrical power had been cut off and secret police moved it.

The only remaining possibility was the foreign media. The BBC and VOA, whose programmes reach much of China, could function as very powerful command posts. I went to a hotel where I knew I could find some foreign journalists but at the front desk was told that all the foreigners had gone. When I came out of the hotel, I was followed again.

At last I found a Chinese woman reporter who was able to put me in touch with some of the foreign journalists, including those from the BBC and VOA. I decided to hold a press conference, and, through the foreign media, to bring the message back to China. But she asked where we could hold one, since there were plain-clothes men and soldiers everywhere in the city. All foreigners, especially reporters, were under strict surveillance.

At this point I met Lao Gao, one of the leaders of the dare-to-die brigade, the group of workers and small-businessmen who had first paraded their motorcycles in our support and continued in many other ways. He told me he had a group of associates who had guns and could use them when necessary. We decided to steal a bus, pick up the foreign reporters one by one so that we would not attract attention, and hold the press conference in it.

The day before the conference, I recorded an eye-witness interview with the woman reporter, relying on her to get it to the outside world. If anything should happen to me before the press conference, she could give the tapes to other reporters.

I collected all my documents and burned them. I was prepared for the worst. No matter what happened to me after the press conference next day, if I could tell people the truth about the massacre I would have fulfilled my life's mission.

Early next day, a brigade member called and told me that all the other members of the dare-to-die brigade had been arrested during the night. 'You must be careful,' he said. 'The mass arrests have started.' I was stunned. I called the woman reporter, but she was nowhere to be found.

I stayed all day in the basement of a reliable friend. News reached me that my name was on the list of wanted people. Our descriptions were issued to customs, railway stations, bus stations, neighbourhood committees. In a couple of days, our photos would be posted all over the country and shown on television. I was not surprised.

That evening I watched television in the basement. The first item was a report I had already seen, in which the rioters beat and killed the heroic soldiers. Thus provoked, the army had no choice but to enter the city to suppress the rioters and bring peace to the people of Beijing. It was just what they had said about the 'rioters' in Tibet and Xinjiang.

Then came the important news: Deng Xiaoping, Li Peng, Yang Sangkung and other leaders were laughing happily. I was enraged by the sight and relieved when the old men were replaced by pictures from a primary school in Beijing, the first to resume class after the 'unfortunate riots'. This 'news' was not new to me: after the Tangshan earthquake, fourteen years earlier, I too had been a pupil in just such a staged scene for 'people's education'.

The next item aroused my attention. A group of famous intellectuals were shown speaking in support of the massacre. Among them were prominent pro-reform Party figures who, just a few weeks ago, had given their word of honour that the Government would not suppress the students after the movement. Also at the meeting were people from the puppet 'democratic' parties and well-known scholars who only a few days ago had been writing articles supporting the students. And there were members of the National People's Congress, some of whom had called for a peaceful solution of the conflict between students and Government. I noted the bitterness of their expressions . . .

How could we understand them? I remembered that while I was trying to find out about my grandfather, I had met an old professor who had worked with him on education. I asked him why, if so many people were labelled rightists in 1957, my grandfather was one of the few put in prison and persecuted to death. He hesitated, then said, 'Those who died were the real heroes. Those who survived were raped.' I was shocked then by his words, but at last I understood. The system would not allow you to live if you persisted in your own belief. If you wanted to live, your belief would be raped. And once raped, you were displayed to demonstrate the righteousness of the Communist Party.

I thought of my grandfather, of his challenge to Mao, when he was put in prison, to see who could live longer. I thought of my grandmother, who chose to lose her memory. What about my parents? After they were rehabilitated, they would not be involved in – even think about – politics. They lived in their dreams of saving the country by science.

It seemed there was only one choice awaiting me – death. The thought of prison made me shudder. A few prisons served as showcases for domestic and foreign visitors; the rest were hell. Your bones might be broken and then you might be put in a wooden cage two-thirds the height of a man. You would become an animal. When I thought of this, I shivered with fear. Could I face this? No. I would rather die. But is there any point in dying for one's beliefs? Mao Zedong, after all, lived longer than my grandfather.

I became determined not to die yet. I felt I must give an account of the Democracy Movement, to show to the next generation and to all the Chinese people.

I sat calmly, thinking and writing. Emotional scenes came back to me one by one . . . my dear comrades-in-arms, Chai Ling, Feng Congde, Wang Dan, Xiong Yan, Xin Ku, Yan Tao . . . Family, history, China, the world, past, present and future poured into my mind.

Suddenly the significance and truth of the movement seemed to present themselves to me. It had been the most powerful democratic movement in Chinese history, and it had exposed the true nature of the Chinese Communist Party for all to see. It had shown the weakness and timidity of Chinese intellectuals, but also their sense of responsibility to their country and students. It had brought the soldiers of its army, who were men of the people, into conflict with the people. When the time came to attack unarmed people, some hesitated, some stopped – and next time, more would follow suit. It had brought workers and peasants, cowed for forty years by their Communist masters and by generations of masters before that, to rise up against their masters. A great movement to establish a genuine People's Republic had begun, and now the movement must be carried forward.

The more I wrote, the more my strength returned, and the more I cherished life. Dawn was approaching. I came out of the basement and took a deep breath. I felt free. I would not go to prison. I would escape.

I trembled like a leaf. A voice in my mind shouted, 'Isn't life much greater than death?' I recalled the cry of the newborn baby, born amid the destruction of the Tangshan earthquake, a call to life so strong that the task of avoiding death seemed insignificant.

I looked back on my life so far. I had grown from an unwanted child to a fighter in Tiananmen Square – and now I was a criminal wanted by the Government. I had experienced oppression, and

rebelled against it. Later I fought against the threat of death and started looking for truth.

But the grim society of China did not give me the chance to understand and pursue life. I thought of Chai Ling's words: 'We use courage that defies death to fight for the life that's worth living.' I remembered the words of the four intellectuals: 'We do not seek death; we seek genuine life.' And life will be found – even in the severe winter of Communist China it budded in the heart of the young generation.

With the buds of life, on a warm spring day we marched into Tiananmen Square. For the first time we felt we were complete – free, dignified human beings. In Tiananmen Square we found genuine life.

The movement was the means of liberating the humanity in all of us. I didn't want to die, I didn't want to be put in prison, I didn't want to give in. I wanted to escape. I didn't know what kind of life awaited me but I knew I must continue the struggle to liberate humanity. In the dark night of Beijing, I stretched my limbs. Only the morning star was pointing the direction with its steady light, a light which was tiny and weak.

I bowed deeply.

'Ah, my morning star, bless me, I am on my way.'